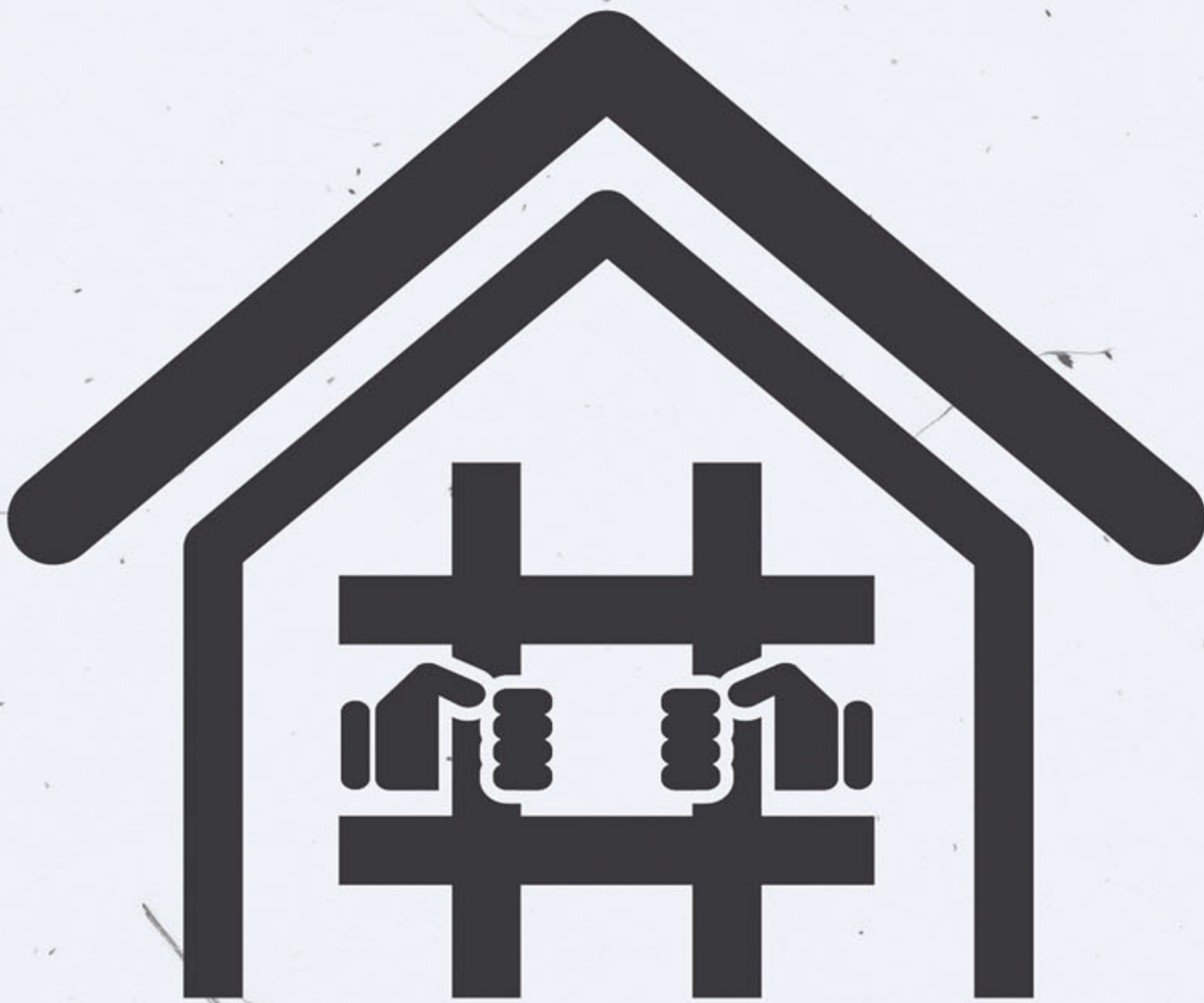


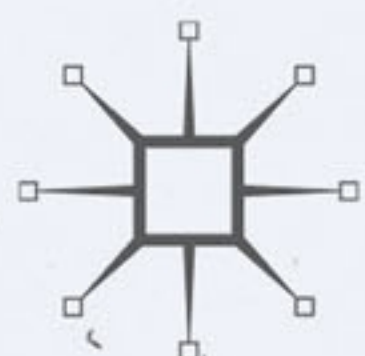


THE SCANDAL OF WHITE COMPLICITY AND US HYPER-INCARCERATION

A Nonviolent Spirituality of
White Resistance



*Alex Mikulich,
Laurie Cassidy
and Margaret Pfeil*
Foreword by Sister Helen Prejean



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Series Editor

MARY JO IOZZIO, active in the American Academy of Religion, Catholic Theological Society of America, Catholic Theological Ethicists in the World Church, Pax Christi USA, and the Society of Christian Ethics, she is a professor of Moral Theology at Barry University, Miami Shores, FL, and coeditor of the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*.

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By Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy, and Margaret Pfeil, with a foreword written by Sister Helen Prejean

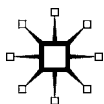
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IN US HYPER-INCARCERATION
A NONVIOLENT SPIRITUALITY OF WHITE
RESISTANCE

Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy, and Margaret Pfeil

Foreword by Sister Helen Prejean

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

Content and Context in Theological Ethics, as a new series in the Palgrave Macmillan titles in religion, offers a fresh look at the millennia-old tradition of ethics engaging religions, their scriptures and revered texts, and their theological reflections on what matters and why. The series is first and foremost focused on ethics, done from theological and religious perspectives, and rooted in the particular contexts and lived experience of real people in history, in the present, and hoped for in the future. While engaged by diverse contexts, themes emerging in the series span the gamut of research in ethics that provoke theological and/or religious concerns; for example, as this text demonstrates, a theo-ethical reflection on and action in the struggle for undoing the centuries-long traditions of racism in the United States and its effects upon and in communities of color to the advantage of white folk and unexamined disadvantages for people of color. The series offers challenges to a status quo and suggests ways to move from complacency in the face of hard truths exposing injustice and/or alternatives to standard approaches to contexts that express the content of a tradition in novel ways and means. As contemporary work in ethics is increasingly context driven and characterized by diversity, this series brings contextual theological and religious ethics to bear on the content explored.

The Scandal of White Complicity in US Hyper-incarceration by Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy, and Margaret Pfeil focuses the emerging critique of how white privilege particularly in the United States contributes—overtly and covertly—to suspicions of criminality about people of color. As difficult as studies of “being white” may be, this text challenges readers to examine how knowingly or unknowingly race plays advantage and disadvantage in most social, economic, political, religious, and, as is underscored here, in judicial-penal arenas. The challenge is raised not to indict, necessarily, but to raise awareness and encourage practical and faith-based responses to participation/complicity, in the affairs that treat far too many in unjust and discriminatory ways. As with other subjects engaged in this series and

a related work in this first year of publication, *Constructing Solidarity for a Liberative Ethic: Anti-Racism, Action, and Justice* by Tammerie Day, *The Scandal of White Complicity* starts with the context of the concrete lived experience of the people most affected by incarceration and then moves out to name and expose the system(s) that perpetuate a culture of violence on individual and community life. Further, white scholars Mikulich, Cassidy, and Pfeil develop a complex analysis of how whiteness operates in the US system of incarceration as they witness a Christian nonviolent way to subvert white dominance and the oppression of brothers and sisters of color.

I am grateful to include in the series' first year of publication a text that so carefully examines from the perspective of three white Catholic theologians the operation of white dominance and privilege in relation to the cultural production of the evil exemplified in the incarceration of African Americans and Latinos in the United States. The US Catholic academy, of which I am a member, has been slow in acknowledging its own racism and, as with other communities of faith, may be both embarrassed and uncertain about how to move toward reconciliation, restorative justice, and right relationship among our coreligionists and neighbors. Rejecting any complicity or cooperation with evil and working a faith that does justice, Mikulich, Cassidy, and Pfeil resist that uncertainty with facts exposing white racism and complicity, while offering measures and practices of accountability, solidarity, and nonviolence.

Readers, welcome to the series!

Mary Jo Iozzio
Series Editor

FOREWORD

I am delighted to commend to you *The Scandal of White Complicity in US Hyper-incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance*. This is a rare resource that offers theological, practical, moral, and spiritual guidance in the work of dismantling white privilege and the injustice of hyper-incarceration.

When I first met Alex Mikulich at St. Gabriel Parish (New Orleans) nearly four years ago and learned of his research for the Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI), I challenged him as to whether or not his research served the social justice imperative of the Gospel. His passion for the Gospel became immediately apparent. Indeed, I found him to be a willing and joyful partner in practicing Matthew 25 as he has been visiting a man on Angola's death row for three years. The theological and social ethical perspective expressed in this volume is rooted in a lived practice of the Gospel.

In *Dead Man Walking*, I shared my experience of entering the St Thomas community in New Orleans, an experience that would change my life forever. Part of my own conversion to social justice advocacy involved becoming aware of my own racial and economic privilege and how I had grown up as part of a segregated Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I know that this book will be an indispensable resource for white people engaging the struggle for social justice.

My own early childhood and education in Baton Rouge opens a window to the import of understanding how we become white people in the United States. *The Scandal of White Complicity* rightly assumes with Roman Catholic theology that we are good people, gifted with the grace of being created in God's image. Affirming that theological truth, however, begs the question of how we become participants in social systems and institutions that benefit one group of people over and against those who are poor and/or of color. Readers who are discerning the role of race and whiteness in hyper-incarceration will find many practical tools and rich resources here for the many struggles they will encounter in the struggle for social justice.

My own background is instructive about the need for this book. The culture of racism is not something "out there" unrelated to our

own existence. Authors Laurie Cassidy, Alex Mikulich, and Margaret Pfeil do not point fingers of accusation from a standpoint of presumptive innocence. These authors are working through their participation in whiteness and approach this text with a deep sense of humility of their need to work with both whites and people of color. While they recognize that we may not be Klu Klux Klanners or overt white supremacists, we still need to learn the subtle and complex ways that we participate in a culture and social structures that systematically benefit white people over and against our brothers and sisters of color.

I was thoroughly graced with a nurturing home and parents who lavished love upon my brother and sister and me. While my mama taught me to pray for poor people “who have no place to sleep tonight,” poor people were somewhere far away like a child’s fairy tale. As a child, I did not see the “colored” people who worked for my family as poor. They were just “colored” people doing what “colored” people did, which was working for white people, and living either in servant quarters, out in the country, or in “nigger town” in the city. It was like the old saying, “a place for everything and everything in its place.” They never used our family bathrooms and had to eat in the kitchen. But if anyone ever got out of place, especially “coloreds,” adults let you know about it. Of course, whites could break the rules, as we school children did on segregated buses when we would dare other white children to go to the back of the bus and sit with the blacks for five seconds. Yet there was also something in black people that attracted me to them, and on one occasion when I wandered to a group of blacks as a five-year-old, mama was quick to get me inside our house.

While my parents were never antagonistic toward African Americans, the social structures and culture of racial discrimination that permeated every aspect of life were never questioned. Daddy provided legal services to many black people, including helping people to buy their own homes. It wasn’t until I lived in the St. Thomas Housing Project that I began to learn that our benevolence did little to address the pain and suffering created by our social, political, and economic systems. Being kind in an unjust system is not enough. To paraphrase Vatican Council II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, at St. Thomas I entered a relationship with people who were poor and of color and learned how their “joy and hope, grief and anguish are the joy and hope, grief and anguish of followers of Christ as well.” This book is born of the experience of those opening words from Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution and it calls all of us to live in that way.

Some readers may object that we have grown beyond the days of segregation that I grew up with in the 1940s and 1950s. To some extent this is true. Fortunately, increase in interracial marriage and adoption is helping many of us to enjoy the unbridled diversity of the face of God among us. Yet, while the nation achieved civil rights legislation that ended legal segregation, how much has really changed? Do we whites live differently? Perhaps we live and/or work with people of color in ways that our parents and generations before them never imagined. Nonetheless, as Cassidy, Mikulich, and Pfeil demonstrate, white Americans tend to be the most self-segregated group in US metropolises. In this present context of relative white isolation, do affluent whites understand where and how we live creates and sustains racial inequality in every dimension of US American life? Do white people of faith know how racial justice is constitutive of preaching and witnessing to the Gospel? Whites continue to benefit disproportionately in education, health, income, wealth, and housing, while people of color, especially African Americans and Latinos, suffer disproportionate burdens in every aspect of life.

I was able to grow in the practice of faith with the guidance of scholars like Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdeN, who taught us that the choice to be apolitical was itself a choice for maintaining the status quo and supporting oppression over and against people of color and people who were poor. The Gospel taught liberation from poverty for the poor and Jesus invited the rich to relinquish their resources and share them with the dispossessed in community.

The Scandal of White Complicity teaches how relinquishment is not only about material possessions. As we have built more and more prisons, locally and nationally, to imprison more and more people in African American and Latino communities, we have also built social and spiritual walls around ourselves. Drawing upon the compassionate and prophetic wellsprings of Thomas Merton and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., our good intentions have not changed the consequences of racial discrimination in America. Cassidy, Mikulich, and Pfeil provide practical, theological, moral, and spiritual tools to help us understand the walls we have built around ourselves and how our liberation is inextricably interwoven with the freedom and justice for people of all colors. They shed light on the possibilities for new ways of being Church and transforming society through nonviolent resistance.

When Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and their respective movements for independence in India and freedom in the United States, practiced nonviolent resistance, they changed the hearts and minds of some people. But that was not the principal

reason that they succeeded. They succeeded because they made the political and economic powers recognize that the costs of colonialism and segregation were too high, not only financially, but also morally. The same goes for hyper-incarceration. Laurie Cassidy, Alex Mikulich, and Margaret Pfeil call us to recognize that hyper-incarceration is too costly for all of us, not only financially, but more importantly morally and spiritually.

We can no longer ignore our own role in hyper-incarceration of our brothers and sisters because their imprisonment is also our imprisonment from our shared humanity, from our baptismal calling to common liberation, and of the unity of the human family before God. Hyper-incarceration violates the possibility of realizing fully human dignity in community because too often we, in the name of “getting tough on crime,” tear apart whole communities and bonds within those communities that nurture and sustain life. The authors extend the work of Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in An Age of Colorblindness* to help us understand the ways that we contribute to the disproportionate incarceration of people of color, including how black men are simultaneously stigmatized by incarceration and made invisible by the labor market as the law and the criminal justice system demarcate white and nonwhite bodies, as well as geographical spaces as safe and unsafe, civil and uncivil. This book rightly emphasizes restorative justice and the need both to call to account people who have violated the bonds of community and to mourn with victims as we nurture the possibility of healing and new life.

Take up this book with your classmates, colleagues, friends, and family for the task before us concerns our shared humanity and collective baptismal calling to become the family of God. We need to learn the pervasiveness of racism in our nation’s history and today in the penal system. We need to learn our role in that history and in the structures and culture of hyper-incarceration. We need to learn ways that we can resist the violence of the system nonviolently and yet learn how our brothers and sisters of color call us to the in-breaking of God’s Beloved Community.

Sister Helen Prejean

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There are so many people to thank as we come to the completion of our project. First, Sue Perry has been a mentor in so many ways for all of us. Her gentle presence, enthusiasm, prophetic wisdom, editorial expertise, and enduring love will be sorely missed at academic conferences. Her retirement from her role as senior editor at Orbis is a great loss to Catholic theology in America. In addition, we wish to thank M. Shawn Copeland for her sage advice and feedback on our text. We are deeply thankful to Sister Helen Prejean for her generous foreword—we will continue work with you toward the day when all the captives are free—both oppressors and oppressed.

Alex Mikulich is deeply thankful to Edward “Ted” Arroyo, S.J., and Mary Baudouin for inviting me to the Jesuit Social Research Institute and welcoming my family to New Orleans in 2008. I am especially thankful to Ted, Mary, and Fred Kammer, S.J., for your leadership, foresight, courage, and perseverance to make the JSRI a reality in 2007. Fred Kammer’s wise and unwavering stewardship of JSRI creates a space that fosters projects like this one. All of my former and current colleagues at JSRI, including Anna Chavez, Sue Weishar, and Christi Schott nurture and inspire a space where I feel welcomed to be who I am, where interrogation of whiteness and critical social analysis are constitutive of living and preaching the Gospel, and where collegiality is lived with genuine care, affect, and mutuality. I pray that we live up to the name of the building in which we are housed—Mercy. I am also deeply thankful for the encouragement of many colleagues at Loyola University New Orleans, who constantly inspire me in our shared labor of antiracism, including Ted Quant, Harold Baquet, Bill Quigley, Kathleen Fitzgerald, Liv Newman, and John Sebastian. I extend heartfelt thanks to Loyola University Vice Provost Lydia Voight for her unyielding support. Thank you Sister Helen and Rose Vines for connecting me with new friends who are incarcerated. I share depths of gratitude to a dear friend who is incarcerated and who must remain anonymous—you teach me what it means to “not let prison get inside of you”—I devote this work to you and

every prisoner who struggles to be human in the midst of inhumanity. Michael Schuck's invitation to learn from First Americans helped me realize that we ought not reduce violence experienced by the oppressed as some form of pathology; rather, we should listen closely to the wisdom others impart to us. I am especially grateful to Jon Nilson, Barbara Andolsen, Mary E. Hobgood, Bryan N. Massingale, and M. Shawn Copeland for helping me get to New Orleans and for Bryan's and Shawn's hospitality on visits to our beloved Crescent City—I hope that my chapters are faithful to the wisdom, passion, and love you impart professionally and personally. I thank Anmol Satiani for the patient tenderness with which you cofacilitate workshops on race and for sharing critical insight into racial microaggressions. This work is possible because of theological colleagues who share in this struggle for racial justice and who provide invaluable support to me in this project, including Jennifer Reed-Bouley, Karen Teel, and Maureen O'Connell—I look forward to continued collaboration with you. It is my great privilege—in the best sense of that word—to collaborate with Laurie Cassidy and Margaret Pfeil who joyfully walk the talk of racial justice in prayerful love and hope that “God makes a way where there is no way.” Angela D. Sims shared wise counsel about how to take up the legacy of lynching; I hope this volume helps all of us take the steps Angela invites into divine “re-orientation” of a shared vulnerability and openness to God's grace. Three faith communities have taught and continue to teach me what it means to live with death-dealing racism every day. The nurture, challenge, and inspiration of Art and Sandy Miller and Sister Patricia Chappell, SND, at Saint Michael Parish in Hartford's North End, and Brian Kavanaugh and Chris and Jacqui Doucot at the Hartford Catholic Worker keep me going on. Desiree Chevalier, Michelle Bergeron, and the entire Saint Gabriel Parish Racial Harmony Ministry are witness to Gospel love within an archdiocese and city that suffers death-dealing racism. This work would most definitely not be possible without Mary Jo Iozzio, who drew me into the work of Pax Christi USA's Anti-Racism Team in 2008. I feel deeply indebted to Mary Jo and the entire Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team because I could not take up my internalized white superiority or write my chapters without your compassionate challenge. Loving thanks to Tom Cordaro for helping me take up white male privilege with a healthy dose of humility and humor so that we may see the Truth—I always look forward to our “cigar commitment.” Cathy Woodson, Liz Keith, Altonette Stone, Randy Gamble, Ronaldo Cruz, Mauro Pineda, Brenda Easley Webb, Cathleen Crayton, and Mary Jo Iozzio have been faithful, prophetic,

and joyful partners on the journey—I hope my contribution through this book is true to our shared antiracist, multicultural Catholic peace with justice spirituality. I thank Mary Jo for inviting Laurie, Margie, and me to contribute to the *Content and Context in Theological Ethics Series*. Last, and certainly not the least, my dearest wife of twenty-five years, Kara Kellaher, shares life, love, and joy daily that is the bread of life. I ultimately devote this work to Katie and Tyler, who have seen and experienced too early in life the meaning of death-dealing racism, that they may yet experience a society free of racial violence.

Laurie Cassidy thanks John Barros, Executive Director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. John planted a seed that I pray has come to fruition in this book. On a parish youth retreat in the early 1990s John described walking home from Boston College High and having white people lock their cars doors as he walked by hearing, “click, click, click.” John and other members of St. Paul’s parish youth group drew me onto this journey and impacted my future more than they know. Ernest Davidson and Titus Pannell are two men, former Marywood students, who have truly been collaborators in studying hip-hop, faith, and racism. Their honesty and courage are a gift I treasure. When Laurie Macmillan, associate professor of English at Marywood, invited me to join her in organizing a conference on hip-hop and social change, the invitation nurtured my research and also our friendship. “Shout-outs” go to former students at Trinity College, Chris Moore, Kristin Chin, Liz Moore and Mo Masterson who challenged me to pursue academic study of hip-hop, got me into underground hip-hop and even accompanied me in buying an iPod. Many thanks to Magee MacIlvane whose thesis on hip-hop’s roots in the Griot tradition has been an invaluable resource for my teaching and scholarship. His contribution (with Nomad Wax) to Marywood’s hip-hop conference was amazing!

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of coming to see the destructive effects of white habitus on a global scale and to understand my own complicity in systemic racism, a process that continues to this day. I remember Jenny's witness and gift to me with inestimable gratitude. St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Germantown, Pennsylvania, my parish for three years, has long been committed to the work of antiracism, providing the opportunity for all people to participate in Race Study Circles and to engage in local antiracist organizing and advocacy. I remember gratefully that community of nonviolent resistance, and in particular, Ann-Therese Ortiz, who has never failed to encourage me along the way of contemplative action by the witness of her life.

I am grateful to Dr. Don Pope-Davis, Vice-President and Associate Provost of the University of Notre Dame, for his unfailing encouragement and generous support of the conference, "White Privilege: Implications for the Catholic University, the Church, and Theology," March 26–28, 2006. Sr. Margaret Eletta Guider, OSF, moderated that gathering with faithful courage, and I gratefully remember our many planning sessions together. Organizing that conference gave me a sobering glimpse of how far white Catholics have yet to travel along the path of antiracism. I am so very grateful to my coauthors, Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich, for their prophetic and unwavering commitment to name and confront white habitus and to create public space for other Catholic theologians to explore how we might develop an antiracist community of resistance in our own guild, precisely as part of our common vocation to serve the church, the academy, and society. It has been a great blessing to undertake the journey of the book with them. Mary Beckman, Andrea Smith Shappell, Susan Sharpe, Debra Stanley, Emily Garvey, and Michael Hebbeler, my colleagues at the Center for Social Concerns at Notre Dame, have been an inspiring source of hope and encouragement in our common work to become an antiracist community. Peter Stone, theology graduate student and friend of the Catholic Worker, has been such an important conversation partner and challenging witness in his commitment to engage other white people in antiracist work. My deep thanks to each of you!

As coauthors, we extend our gratitude as well to the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts in the College of Arts and Letters, University of Notre Dame, for an Indexing Support Grant for this project, and to Ms. Celeste Newbrough, the expert indexer of this volume. Each of us take full responsibility for our contributions here and welcome readers' responses.

INTRODUCTION



THE INVISIBILITY OF WHITE COMPLICITY IN HYPER-INCARCERATION

Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich

So how long do you usually make people your bitch?¹

The reader may wonder why in a book on hyper-incarceration we begin with this question, a piece of dialogue from the television series *West Wing*. This question, part of a conversation between characters on a television program about the White House, bespeaks the complex way that prison life is both revealed and concealed in everyday life in America. The character “C.J.,” the president’s press secretary asks this of “Charlie,” the president’s personal aide after a series of office pranks. The dialogue is set in what we consider to be the center of power in the United States and they use a slang expression that is deeply rooted in the hierarchy and violence of prison relationships. What does it mean that prison reality is so present but invisible in slang and in everyday speech, even in settings like the White House?

Our purpose in this book is to demonstrate that hyper-incarceration in the United States is not simply a problem of prisons, or for those incarcerated. Hyper-incarceration is a system in which we are all involved that is like a web woven with the treads of history, politics, economics, culture, and religion. The struggle is to understand the depth to which we are socialized to be blind to the reality of prisons and the people in them. As with the cultural allusion from

West Wing this web makes hyper-incarceration materially present but often invisible in everyday life. We argue that hyper-incarceration is a moral problem that for Catholics challenges the fundamental understandings of guilt and innocence. Ironically, and scandalously, hyper-incarceration radically undermines traditionally held beliefs of guilt and innocence understood as a result of free will, self-determination, and human agency that reflect our being made in God's image and likeness.²

Let's briefly return to the opening line from television to begin reflecting upon the complex communal moral struggle that hyper-incarceration presents. The term "bitch" is not a new derogatory term. As early as 1400 the word was used to scorn women by referring to a female dog.³ The evolution of this term in contemporary popular culture reveals the interlocking systems of oppression involved in hyper-incarceration. Virginia Heffernan details the word's shift in meaning:

Television's word of the day is bitch, but this is not your mother's bitch. The classic version designates a dog, a hardship, a way of complaining or a spiteful woman, the one whose sharp edge, according to the fearsome sexist double standard, would make her a respected surgeon or astronaut if only she were a man. But the new "bitch," in a usage that has become popular on network television, refers not to dogs or women, but to men.⁴

This shift in the word's meaning is thoughtfully interrogated by Sherryl Kleinman, Matthew B. Ezzell, and A. Corey Frost in "Reclaiming Critical Analysis: The Social Harms of 'Bitch.'"⁵ These scholars make clear the connection of this new usage of the term with dominance and subordination in prison life. "This can be seen in the expression 'my bitch,' indicating that the individual is sexually dominated. The possessive 'my' implies an ownership that is inclusive of—but goes beyond—the sexual. The hierarchy in men's prisons (Sabo *et al.* 2001) consists of 'tough guys' who use violence to get what they want and reside at the top."⁶ Bitches are those men at the bottom of the prison hierarchy and are the victims of violence.⁷ Don Sabo, Terry Kupers, and Willie London write that the term designates a particular image of manhood in prison, "A 'bitch' refers to an individual who is labeled weak, a snitch, homosexual, or feminine or who cannot defend himself or otherwise hold his own in the prison world of men."⁸

So why is this question by a television character so integral to moral inquiry into hyper-incarceration? C.J.'s question to Charlie makes

prisons and the systems of domination that make them possible both present and absent at the same time. Her question is facetiously asking, “How long will I be your subordinate, and suffer the humiliation that comes with it?” What is not explicit is prisons and the problem of hyper-incarceration that is the origin of her question. It is profoundly disturbing that “bitch”—with its association with sexual violence, rape, and systems of dominance and subordination in prison—is used in jest on *West Wing*, and by comics like Tina Fey and Tracy Morgan.⁹ Such humor not only trivializes the violence it refers to, but normalizes the horror of prison reality. It is now cool to use the term, but we abhor even the thought of living the role in prison. C.J.’s comment enacts the white privilege of using the term without ever imagining we will be someone’s prison bitch. As one cultural commentator observes, “Though we avoid looking directly at prisons, they seep obliquely into our fashion and manners. Wealthy white teenagers in baggy jeans and laceless shoes and multiple tattoos show, unconsciously, the reality of incarceration that acts as a hidden foundation for the country.”¹⁰ These ubiquitous cultural references to prison life function to normalize the scandalous reality of hyper-incarceration in America and disable our collective capacity to confront this moral problem.

HYPER-INCARCERATION AS A “CARCERAL NETWORK”

Foucault reminds us that we are all part of a carceral network that includes prison.

Mark Lewis Taylor¹¹

There are more than six million people in the prison system in America, “more than were in Stalin’s gulags.”¹² As Adam Gopnik details, since “1980, there were about two hundred and twenty people incarcerated for every hundred thousand Americans; by 2010, the number had more than tripled, to seven hundred and thirty-one. *No other country even approaches that.*”¹³ Our nation is described as a “carceral state.”¹⁴ Some readers may question the significance of these figures citing population growth in America from 1980 to 2010. In addition, others may ask how socioeconomic factors impact growth in criminal behavior. Couldn’t it be argued that we live in a large country that is struggling with social and personal moral decay?

As Catholic social ethicists we will demonstrate that the problem of hyper-incarceration is not only about the number of people

in prison, but also concerns *who is in prison*. To simply look at the numbers of people in prison and suggest that the problem is based on personal moral behavior is individualistic and color-blind.¹⁵ The fact is that American prisons are populated by people of color and disproportionately populated by black men.

More than half of all black men without a high-school diploma go to prison at some time in their lives. Mass incarceration on a scale almost unexampled in human history is a fundamental fact of our country today—perhaps the fundamental fact, as slavery was the fundamental fact of 1850. In truth there are more black men in the grip of the criminal-justice system—in prison, on probation, or on parole—than were in slavery then.¹⁶

Our country is indeed in a state of moral decay. Interpretations of hyper-incarceration that focus on individual morality are obfuscating the systems of oppression that make it possible to incarcerate some people while turning a blind eye to the criminality of others.¹⁷ Socio-ethical interpretations of hyper-incarceration that do not thickly describe the race, class, and gendered realities suggest a (mis)diagnosis based on symptoms without identifying underlying disease.

Some readers may question our thesis by claiming that there are people of color in prison who are guilty because of committing crimes. Such a statement is part of the moral blindness we are addressing in this book. The focus on the individual criminal behavior of people of color evades *the systemic reality of hyper-incarceration*. In other words, to keep focusing on the criminal behavior of poor people of color misses the systems of white privilege that benefit us and make us assume we are innocent. For example, if you are white and reading this, ask yourself, “Do I have bail money at home for fear I or a family member is taken into custody?” “Do I have concerns about family members incarcerated, and worry how I will visit them?” Never having to think about these things is part of being white in America.¹⁸ As white people, if we have been in prison our white skin allows us to “pass” while a black person can never transcend their skin color. It is the blindness of our white privilege that keeps us from understanding the structural and racial social systems that condition our choices, and even how we perceive the fundamental theological principles of being guilty or innocent.¹⁹

In his groundbreaking book, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* Mark Lewis Taylor argues that hyper-incarceration is a threat to all of us in America.²⁰ Drawing upon the work of Derrick Bell and Gerry Spence, Taylor contends that

“lockdown America” is a “replaying of the legacy of slavery.”²¹ Taylor makes two observations about the legacy of slavery that are critical to our work, and important in understanding the moral problem of hyper-incarceration. First, he points out that we cannot commit financial and human resources to creating and maintaining hyper-incarceration “without resurrecting in America the ugly structural injustices associated with lynching and slavery.”²² In other words, the term “prison system” points to the fact that the prisons are not isolated places where individuals are incarcerated. Rather, we live in a “carceral network” in which multiple systems make possible the imprisonment of more than 7 million people.²³ Michelle Alexander elaborates upon this disturbing data: “The stark and sobering reality is that, for reasons largely unrelated to actual crime trends, the American penal system has emerged as a system of social control unparalleled in world history.”²⁴ The economic, social, political, and cultural systems that make possible hyper-incarceration reproduce the culture of slavery. As Taylor warns, “It should be of additional concern to us all if the building of prisons not only threatens the entire social fabric of freedom but also returns US culture to a form that is structured by slavery.”²⁵

Taylor’s connection between hyper-incarceration and slavery may seem unrelated to many Americans whose ancestors came to the United States in the early twentieth century. However, Taylor’s second point is that no matter when our ancestors arrived here, we are all living in the present reality of hyper-incarceration. No one is exempt from this moral problem; we are all complicit. Taylor points out that the systemic reality of the “prison system” is a national web that connects us all. He describes hyper-incarceration as a continuum of imprisonment that disciplines all people in America.

Within this carceral network, the prisons should be seen as punitive institutions that occupy one extreme place along a whole continuum of society’s disciplining of bodies. Prisons are not places radically other to where the rest of us live, even though some media images prompt us to think that way about prisons and the imprisoned. . . . We are all on a continuum of an always-functioning and all-pervasive disciplinary regime. None of us is outside of this network. In contrast to the prison institution, which we often take to be a confused hell where society places unassimilable people, the carceral network is omnipresent. There is no avoiding it. “There is no outside,” as Foucault says, out of which to cast somebody into some other place.²⁶

The work of this volume is to demonstrate how *we all live* within this carceral system, and to make visible how whiteness makes this system

possible. The cultural practices of whiteness make us both complicit and blinded to this scandalous reality.

THE COMPLICITY OF WHITENESS

“[W]hiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.... Among the effects on white people both of race and privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seemingly normativity and their structured invisibility.

Ruth Frankenberg²⁷

A fundamental part of being white in America is being socialized not to see the problem of hyper-incarceration. We have the privilege to imagine we will never be in prison, and that prison is only the consequence of proven criminal behavior. Being white, we are socialized to see prisons functioning as solely for punishment, rehabilitation, and deterrence to crime. In this view, prisons protect the public from violent criminals. Holding to this idea of prison is a way we are complicit in the system of hyper-incarceration. As Michelle Alexander points out, hyper-incarceration has become “a system of social control unparalleled in world history.”²⁸ In her now classic work *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Alexander notes that in a penal system with over seven million people, it seems logical to assume all of us would be impacted by hyper-incarceration. However, the primary targets of this social control are black men. “One in three young African American men will serve time in prison if current trends continue, and in some cities more than half of all young adult black men are currently under correctional control.”²⁹ Alexander argues that hyper-incarceration functions to create and maintain a racialized caste system in America, which perpetuates “persistent racial inequality.”³⁰ Alexander’s research connects hyper-incarceration as a system to its function as not deterring crime but reproducing slavery and Jim Crow laws:

It may be helpful, in attempting to understand the basic nature of the new caste system, to think of the criminal justice system—the entire collection of institutions, and practices that comprise it—not as an independent system but rather as a *gateway* into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization. The larger system, referred to here as mass incarceration, is a system that locks people not only behind bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls—walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did

at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship. The term *mass incarceration* refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the large web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison. Once released, former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion.³¹

A return to the opening quote from *West Wing* will help to make explicit the way we are complicit—as white people—in hyper-incarceration as the new Jim Crow. There is a greater frequency of using the term “bitch” than is implied by this dialogue from *West Wing*. For example, the characters “Leonard” and “Penny” regularly use the term in the current prime-time television show *The Big Bang Theory* as well as on “reality shows” such as *Jersey Shore* on MTV. The popularity of this word, and what it has come to mean, is a way for white people to repeatedly enact that—that will never be me! I/we will never be someone’s sexual subordinate in prison, and I/we can even joke around about it. I can make a joke out of using this word, even refer to the sexual position it suggests as a claim to my white social location as dominance. And I never have to think about my use of this word. Furthermore, I can dismiss any challenge to my use of this word by saying “you are thinking way too much about this!”

Many white people may object to seeing television sitcoms, and the popularity of this word as pointing to our moral complicity in something as complex as hyper-incarceration. One might ask, “How can using a slang word have any causal relationship to systemic racism or white privilege?” For many people to use the term complicity means there is a clear causal link between my actions and this problem, or that I intend the evil or in this case harm of hyper-incarceration. In this view to be complicit involves a choice and intention on my part, “one can choose not to be complicit. One’s moral standing depends on that choice.”³² As Barbara Applebaum notes, complicity can be conflated with guilt—“the guilt that arises from direct causality to harm.”³³ This understanding belies how white privilege blinds us to the very systems in which we live, and from which we benefit.

Bryan Massingale describes our white standpoint, as “white soul,” indicating the depth to which our worldview determines our everyday life. Massingale describes the essence of the worldview of whiteness as being both normative and unnamed. Whiteness “sees itself as the measure of what is, real, standard, normative, and or/normal.”³⁴ And simultaneously whiteness “studies, but is rarely studied; and evaluates, but is seldom evaluated—at least by whites themselves.”³⁵

Massingale's description of the soul of whiteness opens a way to understand white complicity, and also to the problem of having adequate language to describe our complicity. Traditional Catholic moral categories of guilt and innocence raise the question of how can we be accountable to something we do not intend, or be complicit in something we do not consciously participate. Catholic moral theology has used the concept of "cooperation with evil" to understand and to judge how we are complicit in evil we do not intend. The development of this concept grew out of the need for confessors to understand the degree to which penitents were guilty for their actions in order to ascribe appropriate penance in confession.³⁶

Julie Hanlon Rubio has retrieved the manualist category of cooperation with evil and applied it to social sin. Rubio mentions white privilege as an example of her constructive engagement with the category. For Rubio, the gift of this category in moral theology is that it "gave us a framework of cooperation that illuminated the potentially sinful impact of ordinary actions while recognizing the limits of particular human lives."³⁷ She points out that though contemporary retrieval of this category has emphasized moral complexity and prudence, it also "may lead us to the underappreciated reality of our contributions to social evil and our duty to shape the social order."³⁸ Rubio elaborates upon questions developed by James Keenan to reflect on how individuals participate in social evils. For example, she invites us to consider the following questions in regard to situations where we are participating in systemic evil: Is the object gravely evil? Is the cooperation formal or material? Is the cooperation mediated or substantial? Is the cooperation proximate or remote? Is the cooperation necessary or indispensable to the evil done?³⁹ What is helpful about these questions is that they are invitations for Christians to conscious reflection on the moral character of daily life—imbedded in social, political, and economic systems.

Our study of critical race theory has raised questions for us regarding the adequacy of these categories within Catholic moral theology to address the moral problem of white privilege. For example, there are ethical and epistemological assumptions imbedded within Catholic moral theology that impact how Rubio understands cooperation with evil and the experience of social sin. The implicit assumption of Catholic moral theology is we are innocent; the evil is "out there" in the social system. It is this assumption of distance that allows me to estimate how much I am actually participating in what is distinct from me. In this paradigm, racism and white privilege continue to be abstract and separate from me. The questions used by Rubio suggest a rational process, largely free of affective, cultural, and structural

entanglements, for interpreting the ambiguous, complex, and often barely conscious ways we participate in oppression. As Judith Butler points out,

[I]nterpretation does not emerge as the spontaneous act of a single mind, but as a consequence of a certain field of intelligibility that helps to form and frame our responsiveness to the impinging world (a world on which we depend, but also impinges upon us, exacting responsiveness in complex, sometimes ambivalent forms).⁴⁰

What do our answers to these questions suggest? With white skin how could we use these questions to determine our level of involvement in privilege? Could these questions defend us against the moral bind of our moral complicity? We argue that the systems of oppression are a matrix within which we live—they are in us and we are in them.

We ask, “Who is the one asking the questions?” In other words, how do these questions help us as white people to understand how our very social location—moreover, our very body—conditions this moral inquiry? Regarding the moral dilemma of white privilege the fundamental problem is that the language of cooperation with evil does not decenter the white subject. As Massingale points out it is the white subject position that is the moral problem; it is both normative and invisible as such to itself. It is this white/subject position that is not accounted for in the language of cooperation with evil; therefore, we cannot even morally problematize it or “see it.” Our standpoint is the problem, and it comes with having white skin. We will demonstrate that systemic reality of hyper-incarceration reveals the limits of this traditional language. The language of cooperation with evil does not get at the radical nature of the moral conundrum of being white, and white privilege. Unless the problem of the white moral subject is not the starting point, “the status quo remains beyond challenge.”⁴¹ As Taylor writes, “There is a crisis of understanding underway, as well as perhaps, an opportunity for fresh thinking.”⁴²

Rather than the innocent person, the category of complicity takes as its starting point our entanglement with oppression. In a number of ways the concept of complicity makes intelligible our moral dilemma as white people. First, complicity does not allow us to transcend our whiteness. We are complicit in maintaining our white privilege even if we do not intend it, or are not conscious of it.⁴³ Our moral standing as good people, with good intentions, does not in practical terms remove the privileges we have because of our white skin. As Applebaum has described, complicity as a category enables us to deal with “white moral standing.” She argues that to start with our

white moral standing as complicit enables us to interrogate how we benefit from our whiteness even when the link between privilege and whiteness may not appear to be linked causally.⁴⁴

The category of complicity also reframes what it is to be morally responsible. Applebaum explains that moral responsibility often centers on what the individual is required to do, rather than what needs to be done. The question of what needs to be done is a shift in the focus and agency of white people. To focus on what “I can do” continues to center me, as a white person, as the one who can determine how to solve the moral problem. The individual focus also isolates me from others with whom I am complicit and from those to whom I have yet to become responsible. This framing of moral responsibility does not decenter my position of privilege and dominance; it does not offer possibility of new ways of relating to people of color. As Sarah Ahmed has pointed out, the impulse to *do something* is understandable, and is also complicated. Ahmed explains that the focusing on what “I can do” keeps white people from really listening, and being open to non-dominant relationships with people of color. The focusing on action can be a way to protect white innocence and block authentically contending with complicity.⁴⁵ In contrast, white people must enter into alliances with people of color to understand what needs to be done.

As we will demonstrate, the language of complicity also enables reflection upon ways of being white. To explore ways of being white is to embark on a phenomenology of whiteness.⁴⁶ As Applebaum explains, to explore white “ways of being” is not to claim an essence to being white. Rather, it is a description of “habits of whiteness and whiteness as performativity.”⁴⁷ These habits include forms of discourse that maintain white innocence, conceal white complicity, and block challenge to making whiteness an object of critique.⁴⁸ This white way of being is also what is known as *habitus*. White *habitus* includes patterns of life, “being bound up with a whole system of objects, and charged with a host of special meanings and values.”⁴⁹ What is helpful about drawing upon *habitus* as form of white complicity is that it enables the exploration of white identity as socialized and often unconscious. It is the notion of white *habitus* that challenges the current usage of the language of cooperation with evil.⁵⁰

THE MORAL PROBLEM OF HYPER-INCARCERATION

The American dream is innocence and clean slates and the future.

Toni Morrison⁵¹

Hyper-incarceration is a moral problem that reveals us to ourselves as white people. In other words, at the core, hyper-incarceration is about how as white people we understand our humanity and how we define the humanity of all “others.” As white people we assume we are innocent until proven guilty. Critical race theorists have been at the forefront of exploring how the traditional understanding of guilt and innocence are at work in the operations of white privilege and racism.⁵² Critical race scholars point to the rhetoric of innocence, and its persistence in American discourse as way to interrogate fundamental workings of white privilege.⁵³ As Jennifer Pierce notes, innocence is part of the mythology of America. “[T]he theme of ‘innocence’ is central in the early hagiography on America as an exceptional nation, a nation uncorrupted by the forces of feudalism and aristocratic excess, as ‘innocent’ and unmarked by history, and as ‘innocent’ of imperialism and fascism.”⁵⁴ But this myth of innocence belies the racist history of genocide and enslavement that are at the foundation of our country.⁵⁵

The rhetoric of innocence makes white privilege invisible for conscious interrogation. The rhetoric is deeply color-coded into the binary imagery of race discourse in America. For example, to speak of innocence is also to conjure guilt. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Paul Ricoeur explains the depth to which the symbols of good and evil, pure and impure are dynamically at work within human consciousness and culture.⁵⁶ For Ricoeur, the symbol of evil always is accompanied by its contrast, the state of innocence; this is how the symbol works.⁵⁷ In America, the rhetoric of innocent/white is to implicitly invoke that which is guilty/black. Christian imagery has amplified and lent legitimacy to this binary symbolic of good and evil in American consciousness.⁵⁸ As Thomas Ross explains, the rhetoric of white innocence is a trigger that brings up stereotype of criminal, promiscuous, lazy black people. The “black person of the racist stereotype becomes the perfect implicit, and unconsciously embraced, contrast to the innocent white person.”⁵⁹ Ross observes that the invocation of the innocence of being white actually draws power from the implicit contrast of black defilement.⁶⁰

The core moral problem of hyper-incarceration is that some people are presumed guilty just because their skin is not white, and other people are presumed innocent just because their skin is white. For Christian social ethicists this state of affairs calls into question the fundamental principle that guilt and innocence are the result of moral choice and behavior. Hyper-incarceration is scandalous for many reasons, but at the core of the scandal is the implicit ontology of guilt and

innocence based on skin color. This ontology of guilt and innocence radically subverts the fundamental Christian belief that all human beings are made in God's image and likeness. The concept of *Imago Dei* is a grounding principle of Catholic social teaching, and moral theology.⁶¹ It is from this belief that we claim human beings are created with the character of dignity and that our nature is to be in relation.⁶² Our belief in all human beings being made in God's image and likeness means that our dignity and sociality are intrinsic, not dependent upon any human effort or accomplishment.⁶³ The Catholic bishops of the United States suggest that reverence for human beings should inspire awe that arises "in the presence of something holy and sacred."⁶⁴ White privilege and racism make it appear *as if* socially construed ideas by human beings as innocent of guilt are *natural*. To conflate socially construed ideas with God's gracious intent not only subverts our faith, but these notions also raise profound theological problems. At this moment in history we are at a crossroads at which we must reclaim our shared humanity as—made in God's image and likeness.⁶⁵

We believe that for Christians to understand the theological and moral stakes involved in hyper-incarceration demands an interdisciplinary methodology that makes visible the invisible. One reason it is critical to use an interdisciplinary approach is to acknowledge and to correct ways in which the physical and social sciences have been used to legitimize and reinforce racial stratification.⁶⁶ Mary Hobgood has called on white theologians to engage a variety of "theoretical approaches in the intellectual and political struggle against racism."⁶⁷ In our text we will draw upon historical research, sociological data, as well as use the tools of semiotics, critical race theory, and cultural criticism in order to get a "thick description" of hyper-incarceration. As Alex Mikulich explains in the first chapter, we will be using the term hyper-incarceration throughout our text. Unlike David Garland's term "mass incarceration," the term hyper-incarceration makes clear the problematic we interrogate. "Mass incarceration" refers to the overall rate of imprisonment in the United States, which is comparably higher than in Western Europe. However, what this term does not make clear is *who is in prison*. As Mikulich explains, we refer to hyper-incarceration because the United States incarcerates African American and Latino men at rates highly disproportionate to their overall proportion of the general population.

In our text we will be using "whiteness" and "white privilege." To use the term "white" is to refer to a social construction, but that does not mean that it is not real. In other words, whiteness is not an

essence but a way of describing a position of power in American society. This power is available just by having white skin. With Michael Omi and Howard Winant, we argue that race, and being white in particular, is an unstable social construed category because it is always in flux through political struggle.⁶⁸ As Emilie Townes writes, “Whiteness is a concept and a reality that reveals and explains racial interests of Whites and links them collectively to a position of racial dominance.”⁶⁹

All of the authors of this book agree that whiteness is not monolithic. Race is not biological. While the meanings of whiteness and race have been fluid since the nation’s founding, the relationship between white privilege and oppression of people of color remains constitutive of US democracy and perpetuates social suffering.⁷⁰ Some may object that we focus too much upon a white/black binary. Yet, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains, as “Latinization” transforms American demographics in the first half of this century, white still remains at the top of the racial hierarchy and black still remains at the bottom.⁷¹ The way we value whiteness and criminalize blackness belies any notion that we live in a “postracial” society or that we have transcended the historical white/black binary. We simultaneously celebrate the increasing diversity of the human family, as Brian Bantum does in *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity* (Baylor University Press, 2010), and work to dismantle white privilege and complicity as a critical step toward full recognition of God’s diverse image throughout humanity. Nor do we reduce our embodiment to race or being white. The privilege of being white is conditioned by multiple forms of oppressions such as gender, sexual orientation, age, and being able-bodied. Our white skin cannot be transcended even when we may suffer from other forms of oppression. We will be using the term “white privilege” to make conscious and visible the fact that we benefit socially, politically, and economically simply by having white skin.

MAP OF OUR BOOK

We have begun to identify the primary resources we will be using in this work. It should be noted at the outset that this is not a comprehensive study of the criminal justice or prison systems. Our focus is white complicity in the hyper-incarceration of people of color. US white American Christians have largely neglected the enduring relationship between white privilege and slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, ghettoization, environmental racism, and now hyper-incarceration of African Americans and Latinos in the United States. No other religious or theological text addresses the operation of white dominance

in relation to the hyper-incarceration of African Americans and Latinos in the United States from the perspective of three Roman Catholic white theologians. We are whites developing a complex analysis of how whiteness operates in the US system of incarceration and witnessing to a nonviolent way for whites to subvert our dominance and oppression of our brothers and sisters of color.

We commend to readers other texts that address incarceration. Laura Magnani and Harmon L. Wray's *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System* (Fortress Press, 2006); T. Richard Snyder's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* (Wm B. Eerdmans, 2000); and Taylor's *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Fortress Press, 2001) provide compelling indictments of the US prison industrial complex from theological, moral, and political perspectives. While these texts may name white privilege, these authors do not develop an analysis of how whiteness operates in relationship to the hyper-incarceration of African Americans and Latinos. These texts do not flesh out the extent of white privilege in the broader culture and within the US culture of Christianity. While these texts offer provocative proposals to address the injustices of US incarceration, none discuss the role of whites addressing white privilege as a constitutive dimension of ending exploitative incarceration practices.

James Samuel Logan's *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and US Imprisonment* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008) develops an incisive genealogical analysis of white antiblack racism from an African American perspective. He suggests a Christian ethic of "good punishment" grounded in Stanley Hauerwas's idea of "ontological intimacy." Our book complements Logan's work in the way we develop a historical, social, and cultural analysis of US incarceration as a form of white privilege and neo-slavery. We offer a different perspective from Logan's, as whites addressing a broader audience of white people of faith and social justice, who interrogate white privilege and suggest a contemplative nonviolent way for whites to take authentic responsibility for our own role in this massive US injustice.

The United States incarcerates more people than any country in the world, including China. Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the composition of the US prison population has shifted from majority white to over 70 percent minorities. White men who are 18 or older are incarcerated at the rate of 1 in 106; Hispanic men at the rate of 1 in 36; and Black men at the rate of 1 in 15. The United States incarcerates a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did during the height of apartheid. The issue here is

not mass incarceration of the general population; rather, the issue is hyper-incarceration of people who are poor and black or brown.

No other text examines the operation of white dominance in relation to the hyper-incarceration of African Americans and Latinos in the United States from the perspective of three white Catholic theologians.

A major lacuna in Roman Catholic moral and theological reflection on race and racism is that it fails to address the nexus of race, privilege, and cultural power in the US historical context. The complexity, multiplicity, and cyclical nature of racial caste in US history largely remain unquestioned by the US Catholic Church and by white Catholic moral theology. This failure precludes the possibility of understanding how deeply rooted and pervasive white supremacy is in culture and society. We address this lacuna in the way we interrogate the case of hyper-incarceration of people of color in a so-called color-blind, postracial US America. Our previous volume, *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Orbis, 2007), noted evidence of this lacuna in the US Catholic bishops' pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, "which lacks the analysis and depth seen in similar statements on the economy and peace."⁷² As Massingale demonstrates in his prophetic and penetrating analysis of race, racism, and whiteness in US history and Catholicism, by the bishops' own self-study upon the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, less than 20 percent of all US bishops had addressed racism in their own dioceses, 64 percent of all US Catholics had not heard a homily on racial justice over a three-year period (2001–2004), and there was a lack of black representation at every level of the institutional Church.⁷³ We are indebted to Massingale's wise scholarship, prophetic leadership, and compassionate friendship as we draw upon his insight and encouragement throughout *The Scandal of White Complicity*. Our purpose here is not to provide an analysis of all the documents that address race and racism by US Catholic bishops, the Pope, or the Vatican's Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, which holds the Roman Catholic Church's magisterial responsibility for the body of ecclesial doctrine known as Catholic social teaching. For readers who are searching for a broader study of Catholic social teaching on race and racism, we suggest Dawn M. Nothwehr's comprehensive *That They Be One: Catholic Social Teaching on Racism, Tribalism, and Xenophobia* (Orbis, 2008).

Since the publication of *Interrupting White Privilege* in 2007, while encouraging new initiatives within the Catholic Theological Society of America and the College Theology Society have made race, racism,

and a wide variety of forms of privilege far more common within Catholic theological and moral discourse, race and whiteness have yet to become central categories in American Catholic theological, ecclesial, and moral reflection and discourse. M. Shawn Copeland's guest editorial callout to white Catholic theologians in the December 2000 issue of *Theological Studies* endures:

If there is need for exacting Black Catholic theology that goes well beyond historical retrieval, then there is even more urgent need for White Catholic theologians to critique White racist supremacy within Church and society.⁷⁴

As white Catholic theologians and social ethicists, it is our responsibility to address our complicity in white supremacy in the Church and society. Our methodology begins with the theological, political, and spiritual insight that we live in a time of social and moral impasse. As Margaret Pfeil explains in the final chapter, an impasse marks a limit situation in which one's usual categories of reference prove inadequate to address the challenge at hand. The only way to move beyond impasse is by working through whiteness and its familiar modes of thought and action toward new options that come to light precisely in the darkness of crisis. The struggle through impasse is a way of being in the world and a theological methodology.

A white antiracist way of being in the world integrates the lived experience of anti-racist practice with the development of a common analysis of racism and theological reflection upon the spirituality of antiracism. Simply stated, our method integrates three interrelated dimensions of individual and communal antiracist practice, analysis, and spirituality: (1) White people working with white people to develop a common analysis of white complicity in U.S. hyper-incarceration; (2) White people being accountable to communities of color in the work of anti-racism, and (3) White people becoming anti-racist allies with communities of color in visioning and enacting systemic structural and cultural change.

The first step for whites to contend with the impasse of U.S. racism is to engage our own internalized superiority, personally and collectively, and develop a common analysis of our shared complicity in racist structures and culture. We take to heart Stokely Carmichael's challenge to white people, during the Black Power movement, to go back to white communities and organize white people into antiracism.⁷⁵ This is why we work within the academy and beyond to collaborate with white people in dismantling white privilege and complicity. Second, and simultaneously, white antiracism means

becoming accountable to people of color individually and collectively. We attempt to demonstrate accountability by drawing extensively upon the wisdom of many diverse people of color who precede us in this struggle historically and whose wisdom has been too often ignored by white theologians. We also attempt to demonstrate accountability here by acknowledging and highlighting the scholarship of contemporary scholars of color to whom we are indebted today. Third, white accountability means becoming allies who imagine and enact the full inclusion and participation of all people of color throughout society. Ultimately, our hope and goal is that all of us become part of transforming social structures and culture into authentic and mutually accountable anti-racist relationships between whites and people of color in all faith communities and society.

Antiracism is necessarily collaborative because none of us individually can take up the collective task of healing the wound of racism in Catholic theology.⁷⁶ We welcome more colleagues to this work; our effort is not about guilt or any kind of resentment—it is about our common baptismal call to enact the love and justice at the heart of the Gospel and in order to realize or embody the beloved community, as white people we need to be in mutual relationships with people of color. Perhaps most importantly, if we are going to become part of the “All of Us or None of Us” movement that Alexander calls for in *The New Jim Crow*, we must begin together by subverting our own complicity in the racial caste system that diminishes all of us daily.

In the spirit of collaboration, we have purposely designed *The Scandal of White Complicity* to be organized around three major parts: Part I: Structure, Part II: Culture, and Part III: Spirituality. Some may find this organization presumptuous if not overreaching. As we admit a mystical-political theological and moral approach, we do so to suggest the need for both alternative methods and interpretation of the subject matter and because this study is a continuing step in a much longer struggle of understanding and dismantling white privilege and complicity in the US Catholic Church and society. We are indebted to many who have gone before us in elaborating a mystical-political theology and praxis. M. Shawn Copeland and Carmelite mystic Constance FitzGerald inspire the heart and soul of our book. They witness to a mystical-political-theological praxis that recognizes how all of us are complicit in spiritual and cultural deformation and our shared need for Sophia Wisdom to guide us through both personal and societal dark nights of the soul. In particular, Copeland’s presidential address to the Catholic Theological Society of America in 2004, “Political Theology as Interruptive,” calls for a threefold interruption

of theology: (1) interruption of spiritual and cultural deformation; (2) interruption within theology, and (3) interruption of violence. *The Scandal of White Complicity* attempts to heed Copeland's call to contribute to a political theology that sorts out our particular roles, individually and collectively, that contribute to creating a prison society in the first place.

Both Copeland and FitzGerald helps us name the social, political, economic, and moral impasses with which we must contend if we hear the cry of the poor and desire to share in God's love with and between all of us. Copeland and FitzGerald call us to a way of being that relinquishes our own comforts, and perhaps even sacrifice our lives to become authentic witnesses, to remember all who have suffered oppression and those who have shared in struggles for new life and freedom, and to lament as a prayer and form of justice. FitzGerald's prayerful Carmelite scholarship exploring the "dark night of the soul," at personal and societal levels, guides our understanding of the need for prayer, collaboration, and ascetical practice to prepare to engage the impasse of white racism.⁷⁷ Margaret Pfeil develops this point in greater depth in the final two chapters. We name white complicity in hyper-incarceration as one impasse, among others, with which white theologians and people of faith must collaboratively contend.

Scholars are undertaking this kind of work in many disciplines, such as ethnographies of how people of faith in various local contexts and traditions reflect theologically upon race, racism, and whiteness. For example, Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey's *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) uncovers how Americans came to believe that Jesus was white, how that image was utilized to oppress and justify violence against diverse Native and African American peoples, and how historical transformations in the color of Christ provide insight into particular moments in US racial history and how Americans reflect on the image of God in their lives.

In other words, as the theological academy has been learning at least since Vatican II, theology is not only about texts to be interpreted, decoded, or translated. The site of theology must delve into the lived expression of faith as it is embodied in the world and embedded in diverse social fields and ecological networks (human and nonhuman) and that point to the limits and surpluses of human and divine meaning within God's creation. Inasmuch as we attend to and are concerned with the historical, cultural, and lived practice of faith in the cosmos, perhaps this text is part of a mystical-political theology that points to critical reflection upon "more than belief."⁷⁸ This is

why we believe that *The Scandal of White Complicity* fits perfectly into Mary Jo Iozzio's Content and Context in Theological Ethics Series from Palgrave MacMillan.

Part I: Structure is primarily authored by Mikulich and consists of chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 1, he invites readers to reflect upon the ways that our identities are conferred upon us historically and how hyper-incarceration may replicate previous forms of racial subordination in US history. History is not merely or only about the past; he reveals that it principally concerns our present. Understanding how whiteness has operated in US history is critical for understanding the social, political, and economic structures that form the contemporary carceral networks that implicate all of us in hyper-incarceration. Working toward this understanding demands that we gain critical insight into the ways that the US incarceration system carries the past in the present. In particular, this chapter explores the ways hyper-incarceration finds historical roots in four ways: (1) how US law has protected the power of whites to own and exclude people of color; (2) through the enduring "cultural logic" of lynching; (3) through the emergence of the "New Jim Crow" in the last quarter of the twentieth century; and (4) through the expanding use of convict labor and prison privatization.

This historical perspective helps us understand that hyper-incarceration did not develop "out of nowhere" or without historical or cultural precedent. Mikulich does not argue that twenty-first-century hyper-incarceration is the same thing as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slavery, nineteenth- and twentieth-century lynching, or the post—Civil War white reaction against Emancipation known as Jim Crow. In no way can or should we be nostalgic for earlier forms of racial violence. Rather, because the carceral archipelago so subtly pervades every social field and so extensively interconnects every dimension of US American life, our sense is that the work of dismantling white complicity and hyper-incarceration may well require an effort equal to, if not surpassing, previous movements for the abolition of slavery, ending Jim Crow, and for civil rights. Coming to terms with the history of white complicity is one of the conditions of the possibility of transforming contemporary structures of incarceration.

In this historical context, Chapter 2 delves into "racial Americanization," the term David Theo Goldberg uses to describe the unique form of racial segregation that emerged in early twentieth-century America and marks a so-called postracial society. The fact that whites do not think of themselves as living in a white ghetto is an integral problem of hyper-incarceration today. Whites tend to not be aware of

the fact that as of the 2010 Census of 16 major metropolises, whites are more self-segregated than any other racial or ethnic group. White ignorance of white segregation belies the myriad ways that geographical isolation and segregation shape the ways differing groups are formed and experience the consequences of race. Drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Bonilla-Silva on the reality of “white habitus,” Chapter 2 explores *where and how* whites *are* socialized to be ignorant of their own racialization, to forget and anesthetize themselves to their racial histories, isolate themselves, tending to tell themselves racial lies that deny white complicity. The critical import of white habitus, then, is that whites are unable to understand, much less practice compassion with brothers and sisters of color.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how white habitus reveals multiple levels of complicity in hyper-incarceration. Mired in a geography of segregation, in education, housing, health, income, wealth, and the criminal justice system, whites have yet to learn how our way of living depends upon an economy of incarceration and our brothers and sisters of color. Drawing upon Massingale’s analysis of “white soul,” and Joseph Barndt’s explication of “four walls” of white racism, Mikulich argues that as we whites incarcerate more and more people of color and/or who are also poor, we also imprison ourselves. The scandal is our physical, moral, and spiritual distance from communities of color and our inability to see our own role in incarcerating whole communities, and our inability to practice Gospel compassion with and for those whom we imprison. The consequences are devastating: as too many affluent whites tend to live in a hermetically sealed white habitus, a “deadly symbiosis” between geographical segregation and imprisonment means that (1) blackness is stigmatized; (2) economic opportunity is closed for African Americans and Latinos; (3) disproportionate sentencing effectively rips apart minority families; (4) denial of the right to vote leads to civic death; and (5) prisons extract no-cost or low-cost labor from African Americans and Latinos.

This structure of race and whiteness today is fundamentally inter-related to Part II: Culture, authored by Laurie Cassidy. Utilizing the work of Emilie Townes, the second section of this text unmasks the cultural production of evil in American popular culture, which equates black male bodies and danger. This cultural production of evil legitimates or lends “common sense” to the prison system. Interrogating the representation of black male bodies within American culture is key to understanding how we make meaning of this scandalous social reality, and how hyper-incarceration has become normalized. American

culture legitimizes the prison system by imprinting and even branding on collective imagination the deep-seated myth of the “dangerous black man.”

In Chapter 3 Cassidy demonstrates how the myth of the “dangerous black man” was created and suggests how it has been recycled in American cultural lore continuously since the inception of slavery. This cultural production of evil is essential to the functioning and maintenance of hyper-incarceration as we know it in America, and is a continuation of the dynamics of slavery and Jim Crow laws. Drawing upon history and visual cultural theory Chapter 3 traces the notion of the dangerous black man in white cultural imagination back to the birth of slavery in America. This history is viewed through the prism of Nat Turner. Turner’s historical existence as the leader of a slave rebellion signified liberty, resistance, and the struggle for personhood to black people but symbolized for whites the beast and sexual outlaw. The symbolic power of Turner has been repeatedly recycled in white American cultural mythology.

The present performance of black male bodies in mainstream hip-hop has a frightening parallel to the image of Turner in the history of white American imagination. Like the symbol of Turner, the voices, words and messages of hip-hop have come to mean something very different than were originally intended. In Chapter 4 Cassidy demonstrates how contemporary mainstream hip-hop reenacts the racist image of black men as dangerous and criminal. Though hip-hop was initially a music of nonviolent protest and liberation, mainstream hip-hop has developed into virulent cultural reinscription of the myth of the dangerous black man. Seditiously, this music of protest has not only become a forum to silence black men’s voices but also makes their bodies into objects of commodification. In the performance of hip hop black male bodies as dangerous are both desired and despised in American culture. To conclude the second section of our text, Cassidy will draw upon Mikulich’s work to illustrate that for white listeners mainstream hip-hop is a way of culturally reinforcing our white habitus. Mainstream hip-hop continues to problematize black men as criminal and make the operations of whiteness invisible.

Pfeil builds upon the historical and social analysis of the previous chapters and in Part III develops an account of a spirituality of active nonviolence as foundational for white resistance to the matrix of domination represented by hyper-incarceration. Chapter 5, “A Spirituality of Nonviolent White Resistance to the Reality of Hyper-incarceration,” will turn to the power of witness and the Word of God to explore what a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance

might entail. As Mohandas Gandhi perceived so deeply, the Sermon on the Mount lays out an askesis of nonviolence, and particularly the beatitudes.

In her presidential address at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in 2004, Copeland emphasized how witness—including that of the martyrs—represents an important duty of political theology in the United States today.⁷⁹ Chapter 5 lifts up John Woolman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Clarence Jordan, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, the young Birmingham marchers, Gandhi and his grandson—all have given witness to the nonviolent spirituality of resistance that emerges so clearly in the beatitudes. Rather than a strategy or technique, it represents a way of being in the world that in itself constitutes an act of resistance. Pitted against the institutions and culture of white *habitus*, the beatitudes lead toward a radically antiracist praxis: poverty of spirit; mourning and lament; humility; a longing for restorative justice that leads to committed, collective action; compassionate mercy; single-heartedness; peacemaking; and submission to the inevitable persecution that such praxis will elicit.

Chapter 6, “Contemplative Action: Toward a Nonviolent White Resistance to Hyper-incarceration,” will explore the spiritual dimensions of contemplative, collective action toward dismantling the system of hyper-incarceration. In light of the all-encompassing claim of white *habitus*, the process of building a multiracial, antiracist community of resistance capable of collective, strategic action against hyper-incarceration will depend upon an ongoing process of deepening personal consciousness in community. The antiracist work at hand is at once both intimately personal and essentially social and cultural.

Thus, the specific details of a strategic action plan to dismantle the system of hyper-incarceration will need to emerge from a process of engagement among antiracist white people and people of color as a community of resistance. Toward that end, the restorative justice practice of the peacemaking circle may provide a useful framework within which both white people and people of color can name the truth of racism’s effects and begin to develop a common analysis of racism together.

The Carmelite concept of the dark night of impasse helps to illuminate the specifically spiritual and theological dimensions of this task. As the beatitudes suggest, a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance to hyper-incarceration will entail a gradual process of dying to oneself, becoming more and more interiorly detached from the possessive

claims of material goods and of the ego. This process can be nurtured through specific, communal practices of resistance, including witness, memory, and lament, as Copeland suggests.

The Scandal of White Complicity invites our white theological colleagues to deepen our collective awareness of, and resistance to, the profound role white complicity plays in hyper-incarceration and how we enact our common theological vocation. This book underscores the need for theological and faith communities to enact Michelle Alexander's "All of Us or None of Us" movement as a way of evoking God's infinite love for the whole of creation. We bear witness to God's infinite love for all and thwart the scandal of white complicity when we actively participate in antiracist communities of resistance undoing hyper-incarceration, guided by the beatitudinal practice of nonviolence as a way of being Jesus' disciples in the world. Hope invites us into this common struggle and work where we may yet glimpse the breadth and depth of how all people are "each other's magnitude and bond."⁸⁰

NOTES

1. This is a piece of dialogue from the television series, *West Wing*. The episode is entitled, "Hartsfield Landing" and is episode 14, season 3, that aired in 1999. The character who is the president's press secretary is a white middle-aged woman whose name is C.J. She asks this question of the character who is the personal aide to the president, a young black man whose name is Charlie. To view this scene, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DswqwGi2r-M>
2. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa IaIIae*, Prologue. For more on the anthropological framework of Catholic Social Teaching, see Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-present: A Historical Theological and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), pp. 127–136.
3. Charles Hodgson, "Bitch—Podictionary 699." Podictionary.com—the podcast for word lovers, (February 8, 2008) <http://podictionary.com/?p=724>. Feminist scholars offer detailed work on the derogatory association of the term with women's sexuality dating back to Greek myths of Artemis. Please see Jane Caputi, *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Barbara G. Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: HarperOne, 1983).
4. Virginia Heffernan, "Epithet Morphs From Bad Girl to Weak Boy," *New York Times* (March 22, 2005) accessed May 2, 2012, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/22/arts/television/22chie.html>

5. Sherryl Kleinman, Matthew B. Ezzell, and A. Corey Frost, "Reclaiming Critical Analysis: The Social Harms of 'Bitch'" *Sociological Analysis* (Volume 3, No. 1, Spring 2009): 74–68.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 52. This comment is particularly helpful to see the interlocking systems of oppression at work in the use of one word. In this idea of manhood it is clear to see sexism and homophobia dynamically related in the use of the word.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Don Sabo, Terry Kupers, and Willie London, *Prison Masculinities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 9.
9. These cultural references are dated, and the term is much more frequently used on prime-time TV. Tracy Clark-Flory, Tina Fey: "Bitch is the New Black." *Salon.com: Broadsheet*, February 25, 2008. <http://www.salon.com/mwt/broadsheet/2008/02/25/fey/>. Daniel Kurtzman, "Tracy Morgan on SNL: 'Black is the New President'." *About.com: Daniel Kurtzman's Political Humor Blog*, March 18, 2008. <http://politicalhumor.about.com/b/2008/03/18/tracy-morgan-on-snl-black-is-the-new-president.htm>
10. Adam Gopnik, "The Caging of America: Why Do We Lock Up So Many people?" *The New Yorker Magazine* (January 30, 2012) accessed May 4, 2012, at http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2012/01/30/120130crat_atlarge_gopnik
11. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 43.
12. Adam Gopnik, "The Caging of America: Why Do We Lock Up So Many People?" *The New Yorker Magazine* (January 30, 2012) accessed May 4, 2012, at http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2012/01/30/120130crat_atlarge_gopnik
13. *Ibid.* My emphasis.
14. *Ibid.* It is meaningful that Michel Foucault described modern society as a "Carceral archipelago." Foucault's work on prisons and the disciplining of society as a whole has never been more relevant. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).
15. Eduardo Bonillo-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Rowan & Littlefield, 2006).
16. *Ibid.* Italics in the text.
17. Stand-up comedian Wanda Sykes has a humorous observation about "white color crime" that bears repeating, "You get mugged, you might lose what you got on that day. But I ain't never been mugged of my FUTURE." "Wanda Sykes at <http://www.last.fm/music/Wanda+Sykes>" (accessed May 14, 2012). Emphasis in the text.
18. See more on these questions in Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom* (July/August 1989): 11–12.

19. For more on the structural theory of racism, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62 (June 1996): 465–480.
20. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God*.
21. Ibid., p. 45. See also Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic, 1992); Gerry Spence, *Give Me Liberty! Freeing Ourselves in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).
22. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God*, p. 46.
23. The term "carceral network" is from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 298–300. This statistic is data from the US Department of Justice in a population study by Lauren Glaze, *Correction Populations in the United States, 2010* (December 15, 2011) <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2237> (accessed May 22, 2012).
24. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), p. 8.
25. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God*, p. 45.
26. Ibid., p. 43.
27. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 1, 6.
28. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, p. 8.
29. Ibid. p. 9.
30. Ibid. p. 12.
31. Ibid. Italics in the text.
32. Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 2.
33. Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good*, p. 3.
34. Brian Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), p. 22.
35. Ibid.
36. For two excellent studies on this history, see John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); James Keenan, *The History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010).
37. Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Moral Cooperation with Evil and Social Ethics," *Journal of the Society for Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 117.
38. Ibid.
39. Rubio draws here on the work on James Kennan in "Prophylactics, Toleration and Cooperation: Contemporary Problems and Traditional Principles," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (June 1989): 201–220.

40. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), p. 34.
41. Barbara Applebaum, *Being Good, Being White: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 7.
42. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 2. Taylor makes an observation that is helpful here. Using the term “post-theological” as turn to reflect upon the theological to the political, Taylor emphasizes the theological as saturated with political meaning, and we would contend this is true of the language of moral theology.
43. Barbara Applebaum, *Being Good, Being White: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 4.
44. Ibid.
45. Sara Ahmed, “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism,” *borderlands* e-journal 3, no. 2 (2004) http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/ahmed_declarations.htm
46. Sara Ahmed, “The Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 164–165.
47. Barbara Applebaum, *Being Good, Being White: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 6.
48. Ibid.
49. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1990), p. 74.
50. For an in-depth exploration of white *habitus*, see J. Kameron Carter, *Racism: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
51. Toni Morrison, “‘Five Years of Terror.’ A Conversation with Miriam Horn,” *US News and World Report* (October 19, 1987): 75.
52. No footnote can do justice to this vast body of literature. We will be referring to critical race theory throughout our text. For a helpful introduction to this literature, see Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University, 2001). Also see *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).
53. Thomas Ross, “Innocence and Affirmative Action,” *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), p. 27.
54. Jennifer Pierce, “‘Racing for Innocence’: Whiteness, Corporate Culture, and the Backlash Against Affirmative Action,” in *White Out:*

- The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 214. See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1953).
55. Ibid.
 56. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).
 57. Ibid., p. 25.
 58. For more on the role of blackness and darkness within Christianity, see Robert Hood, *"Begrimed and Black": Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).
 59. Thomas Ross, "Innocence and Affirmative Action," p. 29.
 60. Ibid.
 61. See *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 3, 12; See *Economic Justice for All*, no. 28.
 62. See *Centesimus annus*, nos. 53–62; *Rerum Novarum*, nos. 37–38; *Populorum progressio*, no. 43; *Octogesima adveniens*, no. 12; *Mater et magistra*, no. 219; *Pacem in terris*, no. 23; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 38.
 63. Charles Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), p. 132.
 64. Ibid.
 65. This notion is inspired by Elizabeth A. Johnson who writes, "At this historical juncture the task is to redeem the name of Christ: to redeem it from the way it has been used for centuries to exclude and oppress." Racism and white privilege put into jeopardy our core belief of what it means that humanity as *Imago Dei*. Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in a Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 134.
 66. For more on this problem, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Tukufu Zuberi, "Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods," in *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, ed. Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2008), pp. 15–20.
 67. Mary Hobgood, "White Economic and Erotic Disempowerment: A Theological Exploration in the Struggle Against Racism," in *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), p. 40.
 68. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
 69. Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 56. Italics in the text.

70. Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 12.
71. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism & Racial Inequality in Contemporary America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Third Edition, 2010), pp. 179–198.
72. Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich, ed. *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), p. 5.
73. Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), pp. 68–69.
74. M. Shawn Copeland, “Guest Editorial,” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (2000): 605.
75. See “Black Power” by Stokely Carmichael available online at http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/stokely_carmichael_blackpower.html
76. Since we began the White Privilege and Racism Research Group within the Catholic Theological Society of America in 2004 and with the College Theology Society’s Wabash workshop on Race, Diversity and Pedagogy in 2009 and 2010—organized by Maureen O’Connell and Laurie Cassidy and co-facilitated by Anmol Satiani and Alex Mikulich—we have constantly sought to witness to the need for a collective struggle to name, critique, and fully engage the reality of white dominance. We thank all our colleagues who join us in these efforts. This work is no different.
77. Constance FitzGerald, “Transformation in Wisdom: The Subversive Character and Educative Power of Sophia in Contemplation,” in Keven Culligan OCD and Regis Jordan, OCD, ed. *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness* (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2000), pp. 281–358.
78. For example, see Manuel A. Vasquez, *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
79. M. Shawn Copeland, “Political Theology as Interruptive,” *CTSA Proceedings* 59 (2004): 71–82 at 80.
80. Gwendolyn Brooks, “Paul Robeson,” in *Blacks* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1994), p. 496.

PART I



STRUCTURE

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CHAPTER 1



HYPER-INCARCERATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATINOS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Alex Mikulich

When we lock up so many people—especially so many poor people and minorities—and then treat them like garbage, we tell on ourselves.

Paul Butler¹

This book represents a journey into our past, present, and future. My journey took a critical turn 12 years ago when I was working on my doctoral dissertation. It was a fairly mundane commute on the Chicago El (the short term Chicagoans use for the elevated metropolitan train system) from my home in the far North Side neighborhood of Rogers Park to Olive Harvey College on the far South Side. I was attending a black scholars conference on the economic empowerment of Chicago's South Side African American neighborhoods. For starters, a critical piece of this story that I will relate in Chapter 2 is my own fear of going to the South side. I feel ashamed to admit this fear because I had already experienced the profound welcome of African Americans at parishes and when working with social activists in Washington DC, Boston, and San Francisco. In fact, it was their welcome and stories that drew me to Olive Harvey College.

The conference was extraordinary in the way it included academics, social activists, parents, teens, and those who were formerly incarcerated. There were intensive debates about how to contend with the “cradle to prison” pipeline strangling South Side

Chicago neighborhoods. These debates involved parents and children, including members of gangs, who desired nothing more or less than a stable relationship with their loved ones, free of prison and violence. As I listened, I was struck by the gap between the prevalence of thinly veiled media stereotypes and the humanity of the conference participants. I was also struck by the absence of white folks—I was one of a few who attended the weekend conference—there were no leaders of the archdiocese, no white religious leaders of any tradition, no white leaders of social justice and peace organizations, and no representatives from the Mayor's office, as far as I could discern. Recalling the numerous times I had heard whites rely upon stereotypical characterizations of African Americans and remembering the general absence of African American voices in Roman Catholic theological discourse, I began to understand a modicum of the pain that W. E. B. Du Bois must have felt as he experienced “double-consciousness,”² of realizing that whites did not recognize his humanity or their own inhumanity.

There I began to learn how conference participants were telling on me.

Or, as the former prosecutor Paul Butler puts it more incisively in the epigraph above, what we as a society do to the incarcerated is a way “we tell on ourselves.” Good white people tell on ourselves every day when we consciously and unconsciously accept disproportionate advantages for ourselves while simultaneously contributing to pervasive and persistent disadvantages for people of color in every sphere of life including health, wealth, income, education, housing, and the incarceration system.³ A sign of our times is that good white people, including those who claim to be paragons of antiracism, are formed by, participate in, benefit from, and contribute to a white-dominated racial hierarchy structured into every institution and permeating culture.⁴

By white domination—or white supremacy—I do not mean only or primarily the overt racism of white supremacist individuals or groups such as the KKK. Rather, my emphasis is on a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and nonwhite subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.⁵

Hyper-incarceration is not simply one issue among others. Hyper-incarceration is the latest reincarnation of the relationship between white domination and subordination of people of color in the United States. Put in the broadest perspective, the historical relationship between white domination and subordination of people

of color has never been fundamentally dismantled. I argue, in Chapters 1 and 2, that hyper-incarceration is a new form of a very old relationship. The impoverished urban ghetto and its twin—hyper-incarceration of poor people of color—find parentage in historical processes of white domination nurtured within the culture and structures of white hypersegregation.

Hyper-incarceration reveals the soul of white America.⁶ The story of white complicity in hyper-incarceration cuts deeply into the historical wound of racism in America. Any claim that we live in a so-called postracial society would be laughable if the consequences of racism were not so deadly. Whatever story whites might like to tell about individual merit, achievement, and racial innocence, the enduring history of white superiority and racial oppression goes to the soul of white identity.

I do not use the term “complicity” loosely or lightly. By “complicity” I mean the ways that whites benefit from, consciously and unconsciously participate in, and contribute to the policies, laws, institutions, and social structures that create, sustain, and perpetuate hyper-incarceration. These structures are sinful because they violate the *Imago Dei* and constitute “a dishonor to the Creator.”⁷

As Blessed Pope John Paul II explained in his encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, sinful social structures do not arise out of nowhere; rather, there are at least four ways that individuals remain responsible for sinful structures, including as (1) creators, supporters, or exploiters; (2) accessories through complicity or indifference; (3) accessories through fatalistic violence; and, (4) accessories through consecration of the status quo.⁸

In his introduction to “Letters to a White Liberal,” Thomas Merton called attention to the universal vocation of the Church, monks, and of all people of faith to become responsible for history by witnessing to Christ in how we treat every brother and sister now, especially those most denigrated in society. The measure of our faithfulness is not found in our “reassuring” assumption that God sees “our sincerity,” but in the actual condition of freedom of African Americans. Merton quotes Pope Paul VI’s comments opening Vatican Council II that it is the obligation of the Church “to manifest Christ to the world” within history. The opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, make this historical responsibility to manifest Christ evident:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.⁹

In this theological, spiritual, and moral context, we must ask, “To what extent is ‘the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of incarcerated men and women and their families’ ‘the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ in America today?’” We may miss the import of the question if we fail to grasp the way history shapes us individually and collectively. I believe that James Baldwin’s enduring spiritual, moral, and practical wisdom concerning the presence of our past is a critical starting point for the work of engaging white complicity in hyper-incarceration:

White man, hear me! History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this.¹⁰

We will not understand ourselves until white Americans collectively contend with our role in the enduring legacy of slavery. It will be difficult because it means contending with the “pain and terror” that historically enslaved and brutalized people of color have endured since the “founding” of the Americas. If white people are to address this reality responsibly, we will need to gain critical insight into the ways that the US incarceration system carries the past in the present. In particular, this chapter explores the ways hyper-incarceration finds historical roots in four ways: (1) how US law defines whiteness as the power to own and exclude; (2) through the enduring “cultural logic” of lynching; (3) through the emergence of the “New Jim Crow” in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and (4) through the expanding use of convict labor and prison privatization.

VITAL PRISON STATISTICS

The United States incarcerates more people than does any country in the world, including China. Whereas Canada imprisons 116 people for every 100,000 adults and children and Russia 628 per 100,000, the United States incarcerates 750 people per 100,000. In 2007, nearly 2.3 million people were housed in US prisons and jails, and more than 7.3 million were in the criminal justice system.¹¹ This means that as of 2007, 1 of every 31 US adults is either in prison or in jail or under probation or parole in the correctional system. By comparison,

Wal-Mart's global workforce totals 1.8 million people, just ahead of McDonalds, with the most employees of any firm in the world. Comprising only 6 percent of the global population, the United States holds 25 percent of all the world's prisoners. In 1923, the United States had 61 state and federal prisons. By 1974, that number was 592; and by the year 2000 it exceeded 1,000.

If we look back at any point in the period between 1925 and 1975, the United States incarcerated only one-tenth or 1 percent of the US population or about 100 Americans out of every 100,000.¹² Beginning in the 1970s, however, both state and federal prison populations boomed. The number of inmates in state prisons grew 708 percent between 1972 and 2008 before dropping in 2009.¹³ There is no indication that the decreases in 26 states constitute the beginning of a long-term trend. At the same time, there were also significant increases in the number of inmates in 20 states. The federal prison population has grown at a far faster rate than the state prison population, "more than doubling since 1995."¹⁴

Sheer numbers, however, mask higher incarceration rates by race, age, and gender. Criminal justice scholars commonly refer to this set of data as US "mass incarceration," a term coined by David Garland. He employed "mass incarceration" to denote two characteristics of the US prison system. His first point is that the US rate of imprisonment "is markedly above the historical and comparative norm for societies of this type," that is, Western Europe.¹⁵ As implied in the data above, the current rate of US incarceration is even unprecedented in US history. His second point is demographic and structural: the United States does not incarcerate individual offenders; if it did, we would not observe disproportionate rates of incarceration for any one demographic group. Instead, argues Garland, we observe the "systemic imprisonment of whole groups of the population." Finding that "the empirical markers of mass imprisonment are more slippery," Bruce Western questions Garland's terminology by asking: "When will the incarceration rate be high enough to imprison, not the individual, but the group?"

This text does not use the term "mass incarceration" because the United States does not incarcerate disproportionately its entire population—especially nonpoor white men and women. Neither do we claim that all members of specific demographic groups are incarcerated. Rather, I refer to "hyper-incarceration" because the United States incarcerates African American and Latino men at rates highly disproportionate to their overall proportion of the general population. Consider that in 2010 the United States incarcerated 47 white

women, 133 black women, and 77 Latina women, respectively, per 100,000.¹⁶ These rates approximate the national rate that held steady between 1925 and 1975. By comparison, in 2010 the United States incarcerated 456 white men, 3,059 black men, and 1,252 Latino men, respectively, per 100,000. Certainly, there were unacceptable increases in the proportion of African American and Latino women incarcerated between 1980 and 2010. However, relatively younger African American and Latino men suffered the consequences of the most exorbitant rates of increase in incarceration between 1972 and 2010.

Since the passage of civil rights legislation in 1965, the US prison population has reversed from 66 percent white to 70 percent minorities. The Pew Center on the States reports that white men who are 18 or older are incarcerated at the rate of 1 in 106, Hispanic men at the rate of 1 in 36, and black men at the rate of 1 in 15. Black men between the age of 20 and 34 are incarcerated at the rate of one in every nine. For women who are 35–39 years of age, whites are incarcerated at the rate of 1 for every 355, Hispanics 1 in 265, and blacks 1 in 100.¹⁷

The United States incarcerates a higher percentage of blacks than South Africa did during the height of apartheid.¹⁸ African Americans bear the disproportionate burden of the prison boom, making up more than 40 percent of the current prison population while comprising only 12 percent of the total US population. This projection suggests that over a lifetime, nearly one in three black men and well over half of black high school dropouts will spend some time in prison. These estimates suggest that young black men are more likely to go to prison than attend college, serve in the military, or, in the case of high school dropouts, be in the labor market. For the nation's most marginalized groups, prison "has now become a normal and anticipated marker in the transition to adulthood."¹⁹ Although American hyper-incarceration "has emerged as a system of social control unparalleled in world history" it still tends to be described as a "criminal justice issue as opposed to a racial justice or civil rights issue (or crisis)."²⁰

The disproportionate number of people of color who are imprisoned gains sharper focus when compared with the number of whites who commit drug offenses. Recent studies by Human Rights Watch and the Sentencing Project indicate major disparities in drug sentencing.²¹ African Americans are ten times more likely than whites to enter prison for drug offenses, and yet white drug offenders outnumber black offenders by six times. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 72 percent of all crack users in 2009 were

white.²² These numbers have been consistent for decades.²³ Black youth are “nearly fifty times as likely” as white youth to be incarcerated for a first-time drug offense, “even when all the factors surrounding the crime (like whether or not a weapon was involved) are equal.”²⁴ This disparity reinforces the impression of black criminality and white innocence, despite the greater number of white drug offenders. It did not begin overnight; rather, it reflects disparities in the legal system dating back to the nation’s inception.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS IN US LAW

The legal scholar Cheryl I. Harris explains how the origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Hyperexploitation of African slave labor was achieved by treating these human beings as property objects. Whereas black slavery was used to justify white ownership, the conquest, removal, and extermination of First American peoples was achieved by legally validating white occupation and ownership of land. Harris describes how these two forms of whiteness as property—the right to own and the right to exclude—“contributed in varying ways to the construction of whiteness as property” in US history and legal precedent.²⁵ In other words, Harris reveals how white practices of black slavery and Indian removal were legitimated in public policy and the law, creating whiteness as a right to own and to exclude. Even legal achievement of desegregation through *Brown v. Board of Education* and civil rights legislation, Harris contends, did not fundamentally alter the power of whiteness.

In her analysis of the role of the one drop of blood rule in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that legally supported Jim Crow laws by rejecting Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment challenges to racial segregation, Harris explains how Albion Tourgee, one of Plessy’s attorneys, based his legal argument in the property value of being white. Recall that Plessy, who appeared to be white, attempted to board a train coach reserved for whites and was arrested for violating the white-only statute. Plessy’s lawyers argued that because his “mixture of African blood was not discernable in him,” as a white person he was denied the due process of law and deprived of the reputation of being white.²⁶ Since the brief filed on Plessy’s behalf stated that “the reputation of belonging to the dominant race . . . is property, in the same sense that a right of action or inheritance is property,” and that train employees arbitrarily took away Plessy’s due process guarantees as a white person, Harris points out that whiteness was “property of overwhelming significance and value.”²⁷ Adding insult to injury, the Court’s decision

denied that racial segregation “stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority.”²⁸

As Harris and Ian Haney Lopez demonstrate, the Court never clarified any national standard for determining whiteness, thereby leaving its power and privilege intact. The legal scholar Lopez draws our attention to a body of 52 cases decided between the Civil War and 1952 that demarcated who should or should not become a citizen.²⁹ Legally, the US Supreme Court established precedents or “prerequisite” cases that delineated who should and should not be eligible for naturalization.

“White” has never been defined by the Supreme Court, despite the fact that the Court consistently measured who is *not* white in evaluating appeals for citizenship. The failure of US courts to define whiteness is one powerful way our system of law maintains the naturalization of whiteness and, simultaneously, the perversity of white ignorance. Indeed, as a nation, we fail to understand this history and how politicians and judges have continually reaffirmed white advantage and bias, despite evidence to the contrary. White group bias endures in contemporary sentencing. Although it acknowledges the validity of studies demonstrating racial disproportionality in sentencing, the US Supreme Court and lower courts only admit evidence demonstrating *intentional* racism.

Through this “pinched and parsimonious understanding of what constitutes racial discrimination,” as Lopez phrases it, the courts legitimize unconscious racism and the notions of race that drive disparate sentencing practices. For example, in a 1987 Georgia death penalty case, *McCleskey v. Kemp*, the Supreme Court rejected statistics demonstrating racial disparities in sentencing because they did not prove *intentional* discrimination. This ruling, among many others documented by Lopez, perpetuates the current practice of sentencing blacks; that is, those who victimize whites “will be incarcerated more often and for longer time-periods, reinforcing stereotypes of black criminality and white victimhood.” Lopez concludes:

The long sentences accorded to those who victimize Whites in part result from, and in turn reinforce, notions of White social worth, and by implication, Black worthlessness. Law makes these notions self-fulfilling prophecies that further entrench racial differences.³⁰

Lopez’s analysis of US legal history, especially in the way that the United States continues to assume white as natural and fails to admit systemic racial discrimination within criminal defense and court

proceedings, constitutes one institutional, structured way that legal civil rights have not been achieved. I now turn to the presence of past racial violence through the “cultural logic” of lynching.

THE ENDURING “CULTURAL LOGIC” OF LYNCHING AND THREE WHITE MYTHS

James Cone confronts US white Christians and theologians with our forgetfulness of the scandal of the cross, and of ourselves. Jesus died like a lynched black victim in torment, on the tree of shame. The crowd’s shout, “Crucify him!” (Mark 15:14), echoes in the white mob’s shout—“Lynch him.” And Jesus’ final agonizing cry from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” reverberates in Sam Hose, a Georgia lynching victim who cried, “Oh—My God” upon dying.³¹

Do we hear the echoes of Hose’s cry? The enduring legacy of lynching in the twenty-first century presents white US Christians with the conundrum of complicity in the failure to contend honestly with the roles we fill in the material history and spiritual wounds of lynching. Far from being an aberration or a passing moment in history, lynching shapes and is shaped by modern America.

As the photographic exhibit and book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* attests, photography of lynching was widely distributed through postcards and newspapers throughout the past century. This kind of photography, depicting one of the most heinous forms of terror, was often saved as family memorabilia for generations. Yet, although many of these photographs display a moment of the lynching ritual and its brutality, and record broad public participation—including parents with their children, community business and political leaders, many of whom smile under the shadow of the victim—photographs cannot contain or transmit, in that moment or later, the memories of violence, the unforgettable smell of burning flesh, or sounds of the crowd and the victim. Photographs do not capture the stories told by victims’ families and friends afterward.

Sherrilyn Ifill recounts in her *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century* how lynching concerns human experience much deeper than the image that modern photography captures. In her interviews with survivors of lynching who live on the eastern Maryland shore, Ifill was most struck by the clarity of the detailed memories of African Americans and the equally startling inability of whites to recall any detail at all.³² Ifill details how whites immediately silenced and repressed any memory of lynching,

how whites created false stories of blacks as criminal, failing to present any African American account of lynching.

Three White Myths of Lynching

White Americans need to contend with three myths about lynching that prevent recognition of its full reality in US culture and hyper-incarceration. These include (1) that lynching was a cultural aberration, practiced by only a small number of bigots such as KKK supremacists; (2) that it was isolated in the US South; and (3) that lynching ended with the process of modernization of the economy and culture in the twentieth century.

By lynching I mean the extrajudicial terror practiced by crowds in US history. The US legacy of lynching involves at least the 4,749 known lynchings recorded by the Tuskegee Institute between 1882 and 1968. “Known” is critical because we likely do not know the full number due to underreporting, and the full number does not include lynchings since 1968, like those of James Byrd (1998) and Matthew Shepard (1999). Ida B. Wells estimated over 10,000 lynchings in the early twentieth century. Seventy-three percent of documented lynchings were of African Americans (3, 445). By contrast, there were a total of 2,974 deaths as a result of the 9/11 attacks in three locations. Lynchings occurred in 44 states, including California, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Missouri, Minnesota, and Washington.³³

In his history of lynching of black America, Philip Dray calls public, ritualized acts of torture “spectacle lynchings.”³⁴ Orlando Patterson goes further and argues that lynchings can best be understood as “ritualized killings in communal acts of human sacrifice” deeply imbued with Christian symbolism and theology.³⁵ The major components of the ritual included (1) preparation—picking a sacred space, often a tree symbolizing the Tree of Life and of the Cross; (2) hunting down, terrifying, and torturing the victim; (3) publicizing and drawing mass attendance to the ritual killing; (4) auctioning “relics” of the victim, often body parts including toes, ears, and fingers and making the site a shrine afterward; (5) reports of lynching often referred to a “startling hush” falling over the previously riotous masses at the moment of the victim’s death. Patterson explains, based upon scientific insights into taste and smell, that “the odor of the lynch’s victims roasting body amounted literally to the cannibalistic devouring of the body.”³⁶ Unlike sounds and colors, because of the way that odor memories are stored in relationship to other sensations, “the experience of watching the torture, mutilation, and burning alive of the African

American victim would have become encoded forever, through the overwhelming odor of his roasting body, on the memories of all who participated.”³⁷

Lynching cannot be marginalized as an isolated Southern practice. Not only did the federal government and white northerners fail to interrupt lynching in any way, the US government too forged a “reunion” after the Civil War that allowed white supremacist violence to thrive in US life. Dray writes that

[r]econstruction after the Civil War, the period lasting from 1865 to 1877, is one of the crucibles of race relations in America. It was in this era that black aspirations for economic independence and citizenship were both nurtured and thwarted, white resistance to the strivings of freed blacks began to assert itself, and the pattern of deadly violence as a means of repression emerged.³⁸

In the North, refugees from slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching were accused of poverty and cultural inferiority and charged taxes to pay for projected social welfare and most often excluded from labor unions that were critical for economic advancement.³⁹

Far from being the aberrational violence of a few, lynching followed a “cultural logic” that repressed black economic development through terror, created a myth of the “sexually predatory black criminal” in the white mind to justify the terror, secured white dominance and economic access for those with white skin, and formulated the character of white group identity. Lynching calls into question American modernity, because of white presumptions of modern progress.

The “cultural logic” of lynching enabled it to emerge and persist throughout the twentieth century, argues Jacqueline Goldsby, because its violence “fits” with broader national cultural developments.⁴⁰ Lynching signals American disvalue of black life.⁴¹ Emancipation did not end the dehumanizing forms of terror perfected under chattel slavery; rather, these forms of terror were honed in lynching. The long-term effects of lynching’s place in American history, writes Goldsby, become especially daunting when “today’s gang bangers conduct drive-by shootings that read too much like lynch-mob raids a century ago.”⁴²

However, because the brutality of lynching is so unspeakable and because the lives and bodies of African Americans were negligible concerns of white America, the cultural logic also concerns how the nation has disavowed lynching’s normative relationship to modernization in twentieth-century America. Thus, Goldsby speaks of lynchings’

“secrecy” as a historical event constitutive of American modernity. The “spectacular secret” of lynching is its obscurity within white identity and American modernity. It is spectacular that whites assumed innocence as they mailed and published lynching photography. It is frightening that the publication of photos of lynching kept secret the African American experience of lynching.

White America presumed knowledge in seeing, and because the forms of oppression in the late twentieth century did not look like lynching, it could be disavowed again, as whites continued to ignore the wisdom of black Americans expressed through multiple forms of literature. Cone insists on lynching’s “nowness” because it cannot be reduced to Southern atavism; rather, it must be understood as a form of culture that knows no bounds—“the lynching tree is the cross in America.”⁴³

As Goldsby writes, “The ghost of the yell that slips and flutters down the street calls into question whether the scene stops or launches lynchings’ violence.”⁴⁴ I encountered “the ghost of the yell that slips and flutters down the street” while I served as a lay pastoral associate at an African American Catholic parish in San Francisco in 1993. In the midst of a retreat, one parishoner told her story with overflowing tears of the pain of the yell—of her family’s experience of a lynching in Arkansas that led them to move to San Francisco in the midtwentieth century. Her memory reveals how lynching is “buried deep in the living memory of the black experience in America.”⁴⁵ When I remember my experience of hearing her story, I am struck by my white absence from the enduring present of past racial violence. Upon hearing her story, I began to unlearn my own participation in racism and learn how “the lynching tree is the cross in America.”⁴⁶

Christian ethicist Angela D. Sims invites careful listening to the “the ghost of the yell that slips and flutters down the street” especially through her scholarly examination of Ida B. Wells’s work to expose lynching, including the latter’s risking her life by going to particular “riots and lynchings, to get an accurate picture of what actually happened.”⁴⁷ Drawing upon Wells’ witness to speak the truth, Sims insists upon the “just act” of “a mandate to talk about the lynched.”⁴⁸ This mandate makes different demands upon the perpetrators and victims of lynching. Sims details the ways African Americans demonstrate resilience in the face of racial violence and deploy multiple forms of resistance within the constraints of their social locations.

Utilizing Charles Long’s definition of religion as “orientation in the ultimate sense,” Sims interprets Wells’s life-witness as an act

of “reorientation” to “debunk truth misrepresentations that promote the suppression of other expressions of reality.”⁴⁹ Reorientation for whites means addressing the historically recurring ways we tend to misrepresent language, African American experience, and reality itself.⁵⁰

When whites avoid the invitations to listen to the experience of people of color throughout history, it is a denial of our own humanity and that of our brothers and sisters of color. Whatever excuse we may attempt, including the lie that “it is in past, get over it” or the claim that the call to remember is only a “guilt trip” born of resentment, it bespeaks whites’ failure to engage the actual experience of our brothers and sisters of color.

If whites claim that “progress” did erase the violence of lynching, Goldsby asks, How do we account for the “legal lynchings” that occurred through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s? We need only study the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP’s) photo archives from the 1940s and 1950s, which depict “blindings, amputations, and other corporal mutilations that Southern ‘progress’ was supposed to have made obsolete,” Goldsby explains, to understand that “lynching remained a clear and present danger to African Americans.”⁵¹ Leon Litwack contends that as many or more “legal lynchings” occurred than “extra-legal” lynchings.⁵²

The manner in which white Americans tend to assume that the 9/11 attacks were something new is especially instructive about white amnesia of racial violence. It is curious that white Americans forget that in 1921, white citizens of Tulsa, Oklahoma, commandeered planes from the local army base to firebomb the city’s African American neighborhood and destroy it. That white Americans presume 9/11 is the nation’s first terrorist air attack on American soil, observes scholar Jennie Lightweis Goff, “indicates how deeply the term *terrorist* is raced, since white communities are so often protected from the stigma of its application.”⁵³

White forgetfulness of collective violence, Goff contends, inasmuch as it is reduced to a private affair, known only within the individual “heart” and intention of the subject, rather than as “public speech acts” constitutive of democratic structures and citizenship, “indicts the pathological individual at the cost of forgetting a pathological culture; it obliterates the continuity of lynching with racial violence occurring in the shadow of its history.”⁵⁴

Indeed, while the forms of racial dominance that have followed lynching have been different, it is hard to argue that they have been less lethal. Since the “thoroughgoing disenfranchisement of African

Americans” in late twentieth and early twenty-first century “did not ‘look’ like lynching murders, the kinds of social death that black people endured could be disavowed again in the name of modernity.”⁵⁵ Maybe it is more accurate to say that the cultural logic of our current racial dominance is Jim Crow in a new guise?

THE EMERGENCE OF THE “NEW JIM CROW”

The legal scholar Michelle Alexander calls America’s incarceration regime “the New Jim Crow,” and she frighteningly demonstrates that “we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.”⁵⁶ Alexander admits that she, like most Americans, assumed that while there may be issues of conscious or unconscious bias in any institution, the achievement of legal civil rights had largely ended America’s history of racial hierarchy. When she first came across a sign at a street protest that read: “THE DRUG WAR IS THE NEW JIM CROW,” she walked to the other side of the street thinking that “it does not help to make an absurd comparison. People will think you’re crazy.” As her legal practice shifted her attention to criminal justice reform, she began to realize that the criminal justice system “was a different beast entirely” than an institution that contained a little racial bias. “Quite belatedly,” Alexander explains, she recognized that US incarceration “emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow.”⁵⁷

The nuance of Alexander’s claim is critical. She is not arguing that the criminal justice system and incarceration in the twenty-first century is exactly the same thing as Jim Crow was in the late nineteenth century through the emergence of legal civil rights in the late twentieth century. She refers to “racial caste” rather than an “underclass” in order to denote “a stigmatized racial group locked into an inferior system by law and custom.”⁵⁸ Her work includes an analysis of the ways that segregation was part of a “deliberate effort to drive a wedge between poor and whites and African Americans” and the need to counter this racial and class split through a new social justice “All of Us or None of Us” movement.⁵⁹

She acknowledges the limits of the analogy, including but not limited to the fact that racial stigma has “turned the black community against itself, destroyed networks of mutual support, and created a silence about the new caste system among many people most affected by it.”⁶⁰ She further acknowledges that politicians and constituencies who support “tough on crime” policies do not practice overt racial

hostility like it was during Jim Crow. Finally, and importantly, she also acknowledges how poor whites experience greater harm in the current system than that of the original Jim Crow. She qualifies this final claim, however, because whites who crossed racial barriers during Jim Crow often suffered a fate similar to African Americans.

Alexander uses the term “mass incarceration” to denote the “entire collection of institutions and practices that comprise” the criminal justice system “not as an independent system” but rather as a “*gateway* into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization.” This larger system, she continues to explain, functions “nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did in locking people of color into permanent second-class citizenship.” Naming the system in this way means that Alexander includes the broader set of national and state laws, rules, policies, and customs that “control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison.”⁶¹

She dispels two major myths that sustain the scandal of hyper-incarceration: (1) that the War on Drugs was intended to get rid of the kingpins of drug distribution; and (2) that the War on Drugs was primarily concerned with the most dangerous drugs. Neither is true.

President Reagan’s War on Drugs initiated a new era of “unprecedented punitiveness.” Between 1980 and 2000, the number of people incarcerated increased from roughly 300,000 to over 2,000,000. The vast majority of these have been for nonviolent minor offenses.

Contrary to popular perception, the majority of drug users in the United States are white, yet 75 percent of people imprisoned for drug offenses are black or Latino.

Even more startling were the results of a 1995 Drug Survey question that asked, “Would you close your eyes for a second and envision a drug user and describe that person to me?” Ninety-five percent of respondents pictured a black drug user, even though African Americans constitute only 15 percent and whites the vast majority of drug users.

An ideology of “colorblindness” masks a deeper reality: US society is content with a drug war that defines the enemy racially.

Imagine that white middle-class neighborhoods throughout the nation are subjected to Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team searches that result in indiscriminate seizures of property, arrests and jail for innocents, and even death of innocent people due to excessive use of force. In fact, the use of SWAT teams has increased from a few hundred per year in 1972 to 3,000 annual deployments by the early 1980s to 40,000 by 2001.⁶² Outrage at government and scandal would ensue if these deployments occurred in

predominantly white neighborhoods. Although criminologists have documented at least 780 flawed paramilitary raids, including some that have resulted in deaths of innocents, there is no public outrage.⁶³

Discrimination occurs at every step in the process, from who to stop, where to stop, who to arrest, who to sentence, and whom to imprison and disenfranchise. As Lopez demonstrates in his examination of whiteness in the law, prosecutors and judges rarely acknowledge the importance of racism in sentencing. One study examined nearly 700,000 criminal cases over a ten-year period in California and found that “whites as a group get significantly better deals than Hispanics or blacks who are accused of similar crimes and who have similar criminal backgrounds.”⁶⁴ Yet, in this same study, a small percentage of judges and prosecutors, 11 and 9 percent, respectively, believed that racial bias is somewhat or very evident in plea bargaining.⁶⁵ If these judges and prosecutors mean intentional racism, says Lopez, they may be right. However, he argues that “unconscious racism seems to explain all too well the disparities evident in sentencing statistics.”⁶⁶

Consider the example of Mississippi. Nearly two-thirds of Mississippi prisoners are incarcerated for nonviolent property and drug offenses, compared to half the prison population nationally. Although African Americans comprise 37 percent of the state’s population, they represent 68 percent of those incarcerated. Conversely, although whites comprise 60 percent of the state’s population, only 31 percent of the state prison population is white. The Sentencing Project finds that Mississippi incarcerates African Americans at 3.5 times the rate of whites.

Mississippi has sought reform. Like much of the nation, Mississippi passed “tough on crime” laws that dramatically increased the duration of sentences, like the 85 percent rule, which mandated that prisoners serve 85 percent of their sentences prior to parole eligibility. In 2008, the 85 percent rule was updated to include only violent crime.

If Jim Crow died in Mississippi with the achievement of civil rights, he is born again in the jury box. In 2007, the Mississippi Supreme Court lamented: “Racially profiling jurors and racially motivated jury selection are still prevalent twenty years after *Batson*.” In *Batson v. Kentucky*, in 1985, the US Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits prosecutors from discriminating on the basis of race when selecting juries, a ruling praised as an important safeguard against all-white juries imprisoning African Americans on the basis of stereotypes.

In its 2010 report, “Illegal Racial Discrimination in Jury Selection: A Continuing Legacy,” the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) examined jury selection in eight southern states, including Mississippi.⁶⁷ While EJI is encouraged that the Mississippi Supreme Court acknowledges the problem, EJI documents multiple cases since 2007 where Mississippi prosecutors continued to discriminate racially. EJI concludes that Mississippi’s trial and appellate courts are failing to exercise meaningful oversight. Yet, as Alexander explains, the problem goes higher, because in its 1995 *Purkett v. Elm* decision, the US Supreme Court “sent a clear message that appellate courts are largely free to accept the reasons offered by a prosecutor for excluding prospective black jurors—no matter how irrational or absurd the reasons may seem.”⁶⁸

Although the Mississippi Supreme Court recognizes that quality of representation of poor defendants “goes to the very heart of how we as a civilized society assure equal justice,” the NAACP found that the state does not spend one dollar on poor defendants, leaving the burden of providing lawyers to counties that most do not honor. The NAACP reports that indigent defendants may wait as long as a year to meet a lawyer; that most often defense lawyers lack funds to conduct most basic investigations, conduct legal research, or to hire experts; and that some counties charge defendants court costs and attorney’s fees, increasing the debts of the poor. The NAACP concludes that in Mississippi “justice is available only to those with means to pay for it. And sadly, our country’s shameful history of racial discrimination is still readily apparent in the low quality representation provided to the poor, predominately black defendants.”⁶⁹

Those who would dismiss the example of Mississippi as an anomaly ought to hesitate and consider the historian James Cobb’s conclusion that as indifference to socioeconomic disparity and suffering become increasingly prominent features of American life, it seems reasonable to inquire whether the same economic, political, and emotional forces that helped to forge and sustain the Delta’s image as the South writ small may one day transform an entire nation into the Delta writ large.⁷⁰

Others may claim that the Mississippi example is an aberration because the US Supreme Court, as the one national branch of government charged with the responsibility of protecting minorities from the excesses of majoritarian democracy, would counter the racial bias of lower courts. Alexander replies that such an assumption would be mistaken because the Court adopted rules that *maximize—not*

minimize—the degree of racial discrimination that would occur in the War on Drugs. The Supreme Court, she explains, “has gone to great lengths to ensure that prosecutors are free to exercise their discretion in any manner they choose, and it has closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias.”⁷¹ Adding insult to injury, the Court has also insured that people of color will not face a jury of their peers and will have no recourse to challenge discrimination at any point in the system. Harris demonstrates that this is due, in no small part, to the way the legal system has consistently denied the reality of racial minority group rights as it enforces white privilege and power.⁷²

THE ECONOMIC PERVERSITY OF “FORTRESS AMERICA”

In his critique of the birth of the modern prison, Michel Foucault’s central contention is that the prison, far from being an isolated institution within society, in fact constitutes a “carceral archipelago” that extends “well beyond legal imprisonment,” and makes the “power to punish natural and legitimate.”⁷³ Foucault utilizes the terms “archipelago” and “continuum” to denote the ways that the prison and its disciplinary power permeate every institution of society so much so that it constitutes the social contract. He states:

The carceral texture of society assures both the real capture of the body and its perpetual observation; it is, by its very nature, the apparatus of punishment that conforms most completely to the new economy of power and the instrument for the formation of knowledge that this very economy needs.⁷⁴

If there is a political issue around the prison, Foucault suggests, the issue is not whether or not the system is corrective, nor whether we should have prisons or some alternative. Rather, Foucault argues that the main issue “lies in the steep rise in the use of these mechanisms of normalization and the wide-ranging powers which, through the proliferation of new disciplines, they bring with them.”⁷⁵

The carceral archipelago now includes corporate America. In its 2010 letter to shareholders, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest for-profit prison corporation in America, declared that in market conditions of government-operated prison overcrowding, economic recession, and government fiscal constraint “we believe CCA’s inventory of available beds provides significant growth potential for our company and will serve as a major catalyst in driving our future earnings growth.”⁷⁶

In a society that worships at the altar of market freedom, this may be seen as good news for CCA and its investors. Some may even view it as a boon for local, state, and federal governments. Indeed, for-profit corporations in the business of building prisons feed off of American support for tougher crime policy. Although Americans tend to assume that sending men to prison prevents crime, 30 years of social scientific evidence suggests otherwise. Social scientists find a “puzzling discontinuity” between imprisonment rates, which increased every year from 1972 to 2009, and crime rates, which have been consistently inconsistent—up and down—during the same period.⁷⁷

The perversity of prison privatization is in how it thwarts human flourishing. “Authentic” human development, in Catholic social teaching, is not only that human persons should never be instruments of economic ends, but that the whole of society is called to respond to, and reflect, the giftedness of God’s creation. Drawing upon his predecessors Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict emphasizes a holistic, human-centered approach that celebrates the transcendence of the human person and the development of the whole person, of every person, and all peoples.⁷⁸

Even the *Economist* magazine argues, itself no opponent of market freedom and efficiency, that due to the perverse incentives of private prisons, privatization may cost taxpayers more on a per-prisoner basis than do public institutions. This is because for-profit prison corporations bill governments for more than initial “low-ball estimates.”⁷⁹

Consider the experience of Reverend Elvin Sunds, a Roman Catholic priest serving Jackson, Mississippi. Fr. Sunds describes a phone call in 2010 from the assistant warden of a private for-profit prison in Mississippi:

The warden asked me to supply a Catholic priest to provide Mass and spiritual counseling for Catholic inmates. He specifically wanted a Spanish-speaking priest because most of the nearly 2,000 inmates were from west Texas and California and were Spanish-speaking Catholics. I explained that the Diocese of Jackson is less than three percent Catholic with very few priests. Furthermore, only a handful of our priests are fluent in Spanish.

Fr. Sunds asked the warden: “Why did you open a prison in Mississippi that separates inmates from their families by hundreds if not thousands of miles? Furthermore, why did you open a prison in a state that cannot serve the cultural and spiritual needs of the inmates?” The warden replied, “It is very simple. If we built the prison in California we would have to pay the guards \$65,000 a year. If we build it in Mississippi, we can pay the guards \$28,000 per year.”⁸⁰

Unsurprisingly, this for-profit prison prioritizes low labor costs and its profit over the most fundamental human need for family, language, and spirituality. How the trauma of being geographically separated from one's family contributes to rehabilitation strains any sense of the word and any sense of human development. It is "hard to see the expansion of for-profit industry with a permanent interest in putting ever more people in cages as consistent with either efficiency or justice."⁸¹

As the political philosopher Michael Sandel makes clear, certain goods ought not be for sale, including human bodies, organs, health care, education, and prisons. Two fundamental issues are at stake for the common good of society: corruption of particular goods and fairness.⁸² We should recognize, from the US experience of slavery, that when human bodies are bought and sold on the market, this practice not only corrupts any sense of universal human dignity, it presents a conflict at the very soul of society that is fatal. Cheryl Harris concludes that it "is long past time to put the property interest in whiteness to rest."⁸³

The fact that this expansion of guard labor is not driven by concern for the common good ought to be clear. As economists Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev explain, economists usually focus on producing the economic pie rather than the people and resources "deployed in conflicts over" how the pie "is divided." This latter group, labor devoted to guarding the way the economic pie is divided, has increased substantially over the last 25 years. The problem is not only that there is a robust relationship between increasing inequality and guard labor in nations with extreme inequality; rather, this economic sector does nothing to increase the size of the economic pie itself. Bowles and Jayadev estimate that approximately 25 percent of US labor is now devoted to "protecting people and property and imposing work discipline."⁸⁴

The perversity of privatization is that it depends on filling more, not less, prison beds through the "per diem" costs charged to local, state, and federal governments. This daily rate usually pays for correctional officers, support staff, food services, programmatic costs, and partial medical care, among other services. Per diem costs also serve the profit margins of private prison companies. In this arrangement, the bodies filling these beds become an instrument or means toward greater profit margins. These bodies are wholly disposable unless they are "recycled" or moved—as in the case that Fr. Sunds explained—to fill an open bed.

As Alexander explains in *The New Jim Crow*, considerable private and public interests stand to gain from “the expansion—not elimination—of the system of mass incarceration.”⁸⁵ These interests include the US military that relies upon prison labor to provide gear to soldiers; corporations such as Nike, TWA, Dell, Microsoft, and Burger King that use prison labor to avoid paying decent wages, and “the politicians, lawyers, and bankers who structure deals to build new prisons often in predominantly white rural communities—deals that often promise far more to local communities than they deliver.”⁸⁶

The historian Alex Lichtenstein, who has drawn connections between convict-lease labor of the Jim Crow era with contemporary prison labor, explains:

Historically, a labor economist points out, in the United States “the [racial duality] of the criminal justice system evolved in tandem with the [racial] duality of the labor market”; in other words, penal systems have both defined African-Americans as a “criminal” class and helped channel their labor into the least rewarding sectors of the economy.⁸⁷

Lichtenstein invites us to explore the following:

Imagine what the results would be if the impact of mass incarceration on whites was comparable to its effects on blacks. If nearly 10 percent of all white people were placed under correctional control tomorrow would there be a national outcry? Of course there would. But today’s penal policies are not likely to produce this kind of non-racialized police state. Their character is to be found in America’s intertwined histories of prisons, penal reform, and racism.⁸⁸

If we work the math of Lichtenstein’s suggestion to put 10 percent of whites under correctional control, utilizing the 2010 US Census, that would amount to over 22 million whites (22,355,327 exactly).⁸⁹

The political and economic interests of prison privatization stand in direct opposition to sentencing reform, reduction of hyper-incarceration, and, ultimately, integral human development. The effects of incarceration on an individual are well documented. These include earning less money over the course of a lifetime—by age 48, the typical former inmate has earned \$179,000 less than if he had never been incarcerated, finding it nearly impossible to gain employment and stay employed, being less likely to become married, and highly likely to suffer a wide range of medical and psychological problems. The consequences are nothing less than criminal.

According to the study *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*, 54 percent of inmates are parents with minor children (ages 0–17), including more than 120,000 mothers and 1,100,000 fathers. Two-thirds of these children's parents were incarcerated for nonviolent offenses.⁹⁰ Children of incarcerated parents are significantly more likely than other children to be expelled, and to experience aggression, hyperactivity, depression, withdrawal, and to be suspended from school.⁹¹ This is a consequence of hyper-incarceration foreseen by Foucault: "Although it is true that the prison punishes delinquency, delinquency is for the most part produced in and by an incarceration which, ultimately, prison perpetuates in its turn."⁹² The most important mechanisms for the prevention of crime are social values and controls instilled by parents, families, and neighborhood social networks—what is called "informal social controls" by social scientists. These informal social controls are far more important for public safety than formal controls like the police and the criminal justice system. As the criminologist Todd Clear puts it, "High incarceration rates in these communities destabilize social relationships and help cause crime rather than prevent it."⁹³

CONCLUSION

This chapter illuminated four critical ways that the past persists in the present, through the maintenance of whiteness as a normative property interest in the law, through the "cultural logic" of lynching that endures in the devaluing of black and brown lives, in the patterning of the "New Jim Crow," and in the expansion of convict labor for capitalist expansion. These mark concrete ways that the historical patterning of the relationship between white dominance and subjugation of people of color persists in America. Nonetheless, some white Americans may read this history and fail to recognize how white identity and power constitutes a fundamental source of enduring racial inequality. Chapter 2 counters this assumption by exploring where and how white Americans continue this historical legacy by benefiting from, and contributing to, US hyper-incarceration.

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CHAPTER 2



WHITE COMPLICITY IN US HYPER-INCARCERATION

Alex Mikulich

Thus, the enormous racial disparity in the imposition of social exclusion, civic ex-communication, and lifelong disgrace has come to seem legitimate, even necessary: we fail to see how our failures as a collective body are implicated in this disparity. We shift all the responsibility onto their shoulders, only by irresponsibly—indeed, immorally—denying our own.

Glenn C. Loury¹

The social habits of, let us say, Scarsdale, are not more reprehensible than the social habits of Harlem. Or vice versa. But in Harlem you are a target, and in Scarsdale you are covered.

James Baldwin²

When James Baldwin spoke the words above in 1961, he was speaking of the fact that African Americans are a target of physical violence in the United States and of the impossibility for African Americans to find redemption within the narrow confines of Western European and white American Christianity and metropolitan segregation.³ Scarsdale is “covered” by the fact of being white. Society does not target white communities for exclusion, police brutality, or imprisonment. Whites, in their own mind, are good, innocent, and redeemed. Baldwin indicts the gap that exists between the white ghetto⁴ and black ghetto. That gap reveals an enduring marker of the soul of whites.

Recall how Michelle Alexander underscores targeting in the way entire African American and Latino communities undergo surveillance, seizure, and control by the entire system. The New Jim Crow, she explains, cycles people in and out of prison to impoverished urban ghettos and back again, creating a “closed-circuit of perpetual marginality.”⁵ The sociologist Loic Wacquant describes this closed circuit in terms of a “deadly symbiosis” where “urban ghetto and prison meet and mesh.”⁶ Wacquant identifies three relationships that link prisons and urban ghettos: (1) a functional equivalency in which both serve the purpose of confining a stigmatized population; (2) a structural homology whereby both “comprise the same social relations and authority pattern,” and (3) a cultural fusion between the convict and street codes disseminated through “gangsta rap,” hip-hop, language, dress, and styles of bodily expression and interaction innovated in prisons and urban ghettos. As Laurie Cassidy demonstrates in chapters 3 and 4, white culture tends to appropriate prison and ghetto symbols in ways that reinscribe historical white dominance and violence.

The symbiosis between impoverished urban neighborhoods and prisons has become death dealing through a “triple exclusion” that leads to physical and social death through (1) denial of social capital, (2) denial of public aid, and (3) disenfranchisement on a scale not seen in other advanced democracies. Wacquant concludes:

Through this *triple exclusion*, the prison, and the criminal justice system more broadly contribute to the ongoing *reconstruction of the ‘imagined community’ of Americans* around the polar opposition between praiseworthy ‘working families’—implicitly white, suburban, and deserving—and the despicable ‘underclass’ of criminals, loafers, and leeches, a two-headed antisocial hydra personified by the dissolute teenage ‘welfare mother’ on the female side and the dangerous street ‘gang banger’ on the male side—by definition dark-skinned, urban, and undeserving. The former are exalted as the living incarnation of genuine American values, self-control, deferred gratification, subservience of life to labor; the latter is vituperated as the loathsome embodiment of their abject desecration, the ‘dark side’ of the ‘American dream’ of affluence and opportunity for all believed to flow from morality anchored in conjugality and hard work. And the line that divides them is increasingly being drawn, materially and symbolically, by the prison.⁷

The mesh between urban ghetto and prison, Wacquant argues, is remaking race in the twenty-first century as a form of neo-slavery. Perhaps not so ironically, the contemporary remaking of white racial dominance both makes blackness invisible and reactivates fear of blackness in the “disguises” of criminality, welfare dependency, and the “underclass” because “America is the one society that has pushed

market commodification of social relations and state devolution the furthest.”⁸ In this chapter, I argue that the contemporary reconstruction of racial dominance does not occur primarily within the confines of the prison or economically depressed urban neighborhoods. Certainly, racial dominance is enforced in the “closed circuit,” but that is not where dominance originates. Rather, racial dominance is nurtured within the socially constructed home of whiteness. White hyper-segregation and the home of whiteness—white habitus—form a critical structure for constructing a social body that impoverishes, imprisons, disenfranchises, and socially excludes its black and brown brothers and sisters.

Thomas Merton, who may be the most famous monk and contemplative to North American Christians, is not well-known for his prophetic insight into the souls of self-professed white progressives. Merton, in his “Letter to a White Liberal,” written soon after Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in 1963, asks white Americans, who believe that God “sees the *reality* of our good intentions,” about our professed love of freedom: “But are we absolutely certain that He judges our intentions exactly as we do?” Merton raises a critical question for white Christians who claim to believe that the

Negro is a person, he is in every way equal to every other person and must enjoy the same rights as every other person. Our religion adds that what we do to him, we do to Christ, since we are a free society, based on respect for the dignity of the human person as taught to the world by Christianity. How, then, do we treat this other Christ, this person, who happens to be black?⁹

Like W. E. B. Du Bois at the beginning of the twentieth century, Baldwin and Merton invite white Americans to see how their brothers and sisters of color experience them. Why not honor the invitations of Du Bois, Baldwin, and Merton? These invitations are born of compassion and appeal to our shared humanity. Does our presumed innocence trump the ways that we actually treat our brothers and sisters of color? How is it that racism “functions as an ethos, as the animating spirit of US society”?¹⁰

WHITE SOUL

What does white soul have to do with American racism today? The moral theologian Bryan N. Massingale explains by borrowing an analogy between body and soul, and society and culture, from the twentieth-century Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan, who posits

culture as “the set of meanings and values that inform the way of life of a community.” Massingale explains that culture is something far more fundamental than society, social institutions, or social policies and customs. Culture expresses the meaning of society, the value of the patterned ways of social interaction humans construct, and the significance of the ways in which we live and order our communities.¹¹

Loneragan posits that “culture stands to social order as soul to body,” and, Massingale explains, “culture is the spirit that animates social institutions and customs, makes them intelligible, and expresses their meaning and significance.”¹²

Americans tend to assume that individuals are relatively free to shape their own identity unencumbered by the contextual history, structures, and socialization into which they are born. The ways in which identities are conferred, rather than subjectively chosen, is a fundamental sociological tenet taught in introductory Christian ethics. For example, Patrick McCormick and Russell B. Connors, Jr., in their popular text *Character, Choices, and Community: The Three Faces of Christian Ethics* devote a part of a chapter to exploring the ways that identities are formed in three ways: groups make people, that persons makes groups, and groups just exist.¹³ Their explanation of identity formation is a basic elucidation of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*.

Massingale stresses four implications for identity formation. The first is that an individual cannot have a “private” culture; individuals are always embedded within the shared-group reality of a culture. The implication for racial identity is that no individual is free or innocent of the racial symbols, meanings, and values that pervade US culture. White Americans tend to overstress individual freedom while denying the manifold ways we are shaped racially from the moment of birth. For example, whenever I show Keri Davis’s “A Girl Like Me,” a short video that documents how girls and youth of color internalize whiteness in America, whites are often shocked by the way young black children value white dolls over dolls that look like them.¹⁴ Davis repeats Kenneth Clark’s famous doll study that was cited in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. When asked to pick “the good doll,” between a black and white doll, most white and black children picked the white doll. Conversely, when asked to pick the “bad” doll, most black children chose the black doll upon affirming that the black doll looks most like them. People internalize values of white superiority and black inferiority, like socialization generally, from the very earliest age.

Second, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, identities are conferred historically to a degree that subjective choices cannot transcend. I cannot choose to not be white. White denial and/or ignorance of being white confirms this point. Third, Massingale underscores how “it is within culture as it is historically available that provides *the matrix within which persons develop* and that supplies the meanings and values that inform their lives.”¹⁵ In other words, as white antiracists recognize, like the proverbial fish in water, whites swim in an ocean of whiteness of which we tend to remain ignorant. Fourth, perhaps most importantly, the symbolic expression of a culture through its art, music, language, clothing, literature, dance, and in the “lives and deeds of persons” are not “only markers of tribal membership” but also “representations of the *soul* of a people.”¹⁶

Massingale’s critical point is that too often when the conversation turns to cultural sensitivity, the focus highlights external dimensions of culture that can be experienced through the five senses. Multicultural programming typically utilizes the five senses to celebrate cultures. While what we can see, hear, taste, touch, or smell may be a starting point for critical reflection upon culture, too often the underlying assumptions, meanings, and values of particular cultural symbols or social patterns go unexamined. Furthermore, even though a person might master another culture’s external symbols, such mastery does not necessarily make one a member of that culture.

Conversely, however, being born into a particular culture and being a member of that culture does not necessarily make one an expert on one’s culture. As Lonergan emphasizes, especially in the way that he discusses “common sense” knowledge, unless one gains the critical insight of other cultural horizons and understanding of how things really relate to one another in the existing situation, one may be severely limited by blindness to the limits of one’s own cultural horizon.¹⁷ Critical reflection upon one’s own culture is clearest through the perspective of others, especially if one is part of a dominant culture. Shifting one’s horizon from self-satisfaction to values of the good of others, Lonergan argues, involves rooting out one’s bias by listening “to criticism and protest. One has to remain ready to learn from others.”¹⁸ In a so-called society of “racism without racists,” in which whites tend to live in a hermetically sealed enclaves unencumbered by hyper-incarceration, it is difficult to find a critical mass of white people who are listening to the criticism and protest of their brothers and sisters of color.

Massingale’s main point is that “culture is not principally a way of acting, but a way of being.”¹⁹ Externals are important because they

give meaning, direction, and identity to a people. Even more important is what those externals express about the soul of a culture. What does a way of being reveal about the soul of a culture? This question goes to the soul of this book and why we write because our way of being in the world concerns the fundamental issue of *who we are as the people of God*.

Upon making this point, Massingale invites reflection upon the “soul” of African American culture and the “soul” of white culture. Du Bois expressed similar points in his respective discussions of the “Souls of Black Folk” and the “Souls of White Folk.”²⁰ African Americans have offered, and continue to offer, critical reflection upon the externals of culture to discern the various good and evil spirits, indeed the soul, of African American and white cultures. Whites have yet to take up the wisdom and critical insight of Du Bois and Massingale, among many other people of color. Until we do so collectively, we will fail to perceive our role in the life chances of people of color, much less the threat we pose to our own souls and our need for people of color.

Describing African American culture, Massingale, like Du Bois before him, begins by highlighting the wide geographical, class, vocational, gender, and religious diversities among African American people. In no way is African American monolithic. Yet, celebrating this diversity, Massingale speaks of a common African American culture rooted in the common experience black folk experience in terms of “racial prejudice, discrimination, rejection, and hostility—both subtle and overt—based upon the simple fact of our physical blackness.”²¹ At least two ingredients are common to African American culture. Rooted in the common experience of *natal alienation*,²² the term Orlando Patterson uses to describe how African peoples were stripped from their homes and cultures of birth in Africa, and systematically denied humanity in the United States, the first ingredient of African American culture is the “expectation of struggle.”²³

Ever since they were forced upon slave ships, Africans in diaspora have known that they must struggle for life. This leads to the second common ingredient. “*The second ingredient is the belief that society (‘the system’ or ‘the Man’) is more foe than friend*, a theme echoed by African American writers and social activists from the days of slavery to recent times.”²⁴ In Massingale’s evaluation, a “passionate quest for freedom, equality, and dignity in a racially hostile milieu” is the “‘soul’ of black culture.”

I gained a deeper sense of “the system” and “the Man” upon my participation in African American Scholars Conference that I described

at the beginning of Chapter 1. As I made my way into Olive Harvey College, tucked in between Bishop Ford Freeway and Stony Island Avenue on Chicago's South Side, the entrance and a long hallway were filled with merchant's booths selling clothes, books, and jewelry. One of the booths was selling white shirts with black printing that read **KILL THE WHITE MAN**. As soon as my eye caught that message my heart pounded with fear and anger. I nearly stumbled and turned my body around. I was ready to make my way back home.

Yet as my heart pounded I recalled the sorrow and pain expressed by a woman at the Sacred Heart Parish retreat, in which she recounted her family's migration from Arkansas in the wake of a lynching (a story that I recounted in Chapter 1). I also remembered what I learned from African American security guards at St Anthony's, a social service agency in San Francisco, upon the announcement of the April 29, 1992, acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King. They taught me about police brutality they experienced in their lives as we were quarantined by San Francisco police attempting to quell violence in the wake of the acquittal. If I left the conference and returned home, I felt that I would be turning my back on the parishioners at Sacred Heart and the security guards at St. Anthony's. As I joined the conference and expressed to several participants how I initially interpreted the T-shirts, they welcomed me with hearty laughter and I learned that the message on the shirts was aimed at destroying "the system." Nonetheless, the relatively mild struggle that I underwent to make it inside the conference was another moment in which I began to gain insight into my own privilege. My own fear was born of ignorance of being a beneficiary of "the System." I was slowly learning to see something much larger shaping our lives.

Massingale also unpacks the ways whites present a common white culture in the US American context. For starters, in contrast to African American culture, united by a common sense of struggle for human dignity, whites do not know that they are white. Whites do not describe themselves in terms of race or whiteness. One teaching tool that I utilize helps students recognize this point. Students are invited to list five things that they believe are most important to describe their own identity. Nearly universally, students of color will include a racial and/or ethnic heritage within the top three on their list. Conversely, having utilized this exercise for eleven years, never has a white student written "white" on their list. While recent East European and European immigrants often identify a national or ethnic heritage, many white students are unaware of their ethnic heritage. As many scholars, including Massingale, observe, whiteness remains

unquestioned, unnamed, and invisible. Many whites self-identify as “American,” without identifying as white, as if white is the norm of being American.

At the soul of white culture is a worldview in which whites see themselves “as the measure of what is real, standard, normative, and/or normal.”²⁵ Massingale shares an example from his own experience to express this point. As a seminary student for the priesthood, his annual evaluation by the faculty would often raise the question of how Massingale, as a black man, would fit into a white parish. Yet never was a question raised about how a white parish would accept Massingale, and never did the predominantly white seminary community ever question how it treated a black man.²⁶

White means not having to think about being white or our role in racial conflict. For example, when I was growing up in East Lansing, Michigan, I recall my parents discussing the violence that had erupted in Detroit in 1967. They had viewed the fires in Detroit from the top of Duns Scotus Seminary bell tower with a Franciscan priest. Their discussion of the riots struck me then and sticks with me now because their conversation was focused on the participants in the riots. My parents did not express, in any way, what the riots might have to do with us. The rioting was “over there” and was “about them.” I am indebted to my parents for the way that they taught my sisters and me to think and discuss critically events of the day. Yet in the case of the civil rights movement and the Detroit riots, these critical issues were somehow left out, and certainly did not involve us. Fortunately, however, I did begin to learn a different perspective from the Maryknoll sisters who had walked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from Selma to Montgomery. Their passionate witness to racial justice was a critical early interruption in my otherwise comfortable life.

Thus, as Massingale explains, if the commonality of African American culture “is the expectation of struggle,” the common feature of white culture “is the presumption of dominance and entitlement” in which white culture does not acknowledge its structured advantage, does not see its particular standpoint at the top of racial hierarchy within society, and does not name whiteness as norm by which everything is judged. If I return to my reaction to the T-shirts that frightened me at the African American scholars conference, my shock has everything to do with my early socialization as a white person who was taught to be ignorant about the causes of the Detroit riots. Since the “system” worked for us, and helped us advance socially, economically, and through advanced education, we could take these advantages for granted.

We white Americans need to see our complicity in the deadly symbiosis between prisons and marginalized urban communities. There we will look into a mirror into our own souls.

THE PATHOLOGY OF WHITE SEGREGATION: AN ENDURING MARKER OF RACE IN AMERICA

In his classic *Dark Ghetto: The Dilemmas of Social Power*, Clark passionately explained:

Racial segregation, like all other forms of cruelty and tyranny, debases all human beings—those who are its victims, those who victimize, and in quite subtle ways those who are merely accessories. This human debasement can only be comprehended as a consequence of the society which spawns it.²⁷

Clark's title is slightly misleading if it is assumed he was only studying the pathologies of blacks. Clark dissects white pathologies that create racial inequality in first place, including the enduring insistence by whites "that the oppressed are urged to be concerned about the comfort and sensitivities of those they regard as their oppressors."²⁸ The clear implication, in Clark's analysis, is the "age-old" threat of "white backlash," the "struggle of those with power to deny power to those who have none." "White backlash," Clark explains, "is a new name for an old phenomenon, white resistance to the acceptance of the Negro as a human being."²⁹

Sadly, too much of social scientific research, going back to the emergence of schools of sociology and social work at the beginning of the twentieth century, was focused on the pathologies of white ethnic or black poor as if they were a biological or cultural defect of an inferior class and/or race of people.³⁰ Clark was clear that his study of ghetto pathology could not be reduced to a biological or cultural fact as he stressed both the agency of blacks in Harlem and the ways whites contributed to the debasement of African Americans. He emphasizes that segregation is never chosen by the oppressed. The resulting pathologies of segregation are fundamentally related to the action of oppressors—those who create, organize, and enforce segregation in the first place.

THE HISTORICAL STRUCTURING OF AMERICAN SEGREGATION

One of the defining characteristics of whiteness in the US American context has been the segregation of social space—physical,

geographic, political, and economic—to exclude and marginalize African Americans. As we saw in Chapter 1 through the work of Cheryl Harris, whiteness as property developed early in US history, not merely as a right to freely choose among open lands, but as the right of whites to remove and occupy First American lands. This set the precedent for public policy and law to legitimize and protect the right of whites to exclude. While the forms of spatial exclusion have changed, that is, exclusion from citizenship while extracting free labor during slavery, overt white supremacy defining “separate but equal” Jim Crow customs from the end of Reconstruction until civil rights, and a so-called colorblindness defining the resegregation of US metropolitan areas since the civil rights movement, white housing and educational segregation remains a structural lynchpin for a “deadly symbiosis” between impoverished urban communities of color and prisons. In other words, social observers tend to focus exclusively on impoverished communities of color or the relationship between “urban ghettos” and prisons, without attending to the spatial structuring of white dominance and segregation in society.

The social forces that contributed to the creation of economically depressed urban neighborhoods, especially prominent in northeastern, midwestern, and southern cities in the 1980s, did not suddenly emerge in the 1960s or 1970s. At the height of the Jim Crow era, as Du Bois demonstrates in his classic study *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, first published in 1899, white racial segregation of US cities was well under way. Du Bois found the conditions of African Americans in Philadelphia rooted in slavery, in the failure of the nation to uplift former slaves after the Civil War, and in enduring discrimination in employment—“no matter how well trained a Negro may be,” and in the segregation of work and housing.³¹

Contrary to a common mythology that assumes that African Americans migrating from the Jim Crow South found liberation in relatively progressive northern cities in the early twentieth century, scholars of diverse disciplines document widespread segregation, employment discrimination, and economic marginalization marking the African American experience in the urban north.³²

While European migration to many northern cities coincided with African American migration from the South in the first half of the twentieth century, and as new Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Latino urban settlements increased interracial interactions, communities of color became increasingly isolated within US cities. The containment of these communities was structurally related to the emergence of largely white European suburban neighborhoods.³³

Formal government and corporate practices of “redlining” facilitated racial housing segregation in the first half of the twentieth century. Redlining was the practice whereby government agencies, real estate, and banking companies demarcated residential zones for their racial and economic desirability. As David Theo Goldberg demonstrates, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), a federal agency “charged with establishing ‘residential security maps’ for 239 US cities, utilized racial redlining from the 1930s. HOLC prepared the “‘confidential residential security maps’” with “special assistance from ‘competent local real estate brokers and mortgage lenders believed to represent a fair and composite opinion of the best qualified people.’”³⁴ Residential security maps applied explicit color coding that included blue for the most affluent and desirable white areas, less affluent areas were colored yellow, and areas inhabited by African Americans, the “undesirable population,” were colored with the alarmist red.³⁵ The residential security map of Baltimore, Maryland, the HOLC’s map of Philadelphia is online at http://www.umass.edu/sadri/ssh-journal/HOLC_1937.html. One indication of how these maps have become internalized is how routinely whites avoid travel through urban communities of color. African Americans, however, know that they cannot include themselves among the major beneficiaries of trillions of dollars of wealth accumulated through the appreciation of housing assets secured by federally insured loans between 1932 and 1962 because 98 percent of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans made during that era went to whites via the openly racist categories utilized the agency’s official manuals for appraisers.³⁶

These security maps became an established mechanism for government, real estate interests, mortgage lenders, and banks to bolster white economic development and deny home loans and small business loans to African American and other communities of color. Redlining was thus a critical factor structuring racial segregation, fueling white suburbanization, isolating relatively poor, urban African American neighborhoods, and thereby creating the conditions for a depression-level joblessness and poverty. Contemporary gated communities, Goldberg concludes, “are essentially privatized modalities of redlining, *segregating* communities informally extended.”³⁷

Social scientists have demonstrated that hypersegregation is a “structural lynchpin” of economic and racial inequality.³⁸ I draw upon contemporary studies of housing resegregation demonstrating how housing location is critical to predicting access to quality public education, development of personal wealth, employment,

health and safety, democratic participation, transportation, and child care.

Suburbanization of the white middle class from the 1940s to the 1970s was also facilitated by federal highway and transportation policies that included building highways through formerly healthy urban neighborhoods and provided mortgages for white veterans, mortgage tax exemptions, and production of massive tract housing after World War II. Restrictive covenants (which exclude people of color from white developments), as well as housing and lending discrimination, effectively blocked African Americans from accumulating wealth. These unearned advantages for whites structure historic unearned disadvantages for African Americans.³⁹

Historian John T. McGreevey demonstrates how white Catholics in the urban north dealt with the in-migration of blacks.⁴⁰ McGreevey's study is significant because Roman Catholics represented the largest single denomination in northern cities and thus played an important role in race relations in every dimension of life. White Catholic stereotyping of blacks as essentially violent and dangerous often meant that isolated incidents of black crime spurred an immediate and disproportionate out-migration of white Catholics from central city neighborhoods.⁴¹ He explains that

[i]n large part, concerns over crime merged with already present racial stereotypes. Many heavily Catholic areas contained the bulk of urban firemen, policemen, and groups whose contacts with African-Americans reinforced racial stereotypes. Placed in this perspective, a single incident could eradicate years of patient community organizing [for racial integration].⁴²

McGreevey notes, for example, how an incident in which a black teenager fatally shot a white parishioner of a parish on the South Side of Chicago spurred over 1,000 families (over 3,500 people) to leave their neighborhood over a one-year period during 1965–1966. His account suggests that the flow of whites to suburbs was motivated not only by economic opportunity but also by racial stereotyping of African Americans as violent and dangerous. Furthermore, underscoring the losses of critical intermediate social institutions such as churches, small businesses, and voluntary organizations, 48 Catholic parishes closed between 1960 and 1990 in Chicago, at least 20 of which were located within areas famously referred to as the “black belt.” Bishops in urban dioceses “closed scores of once vibrant parishes in northern cities, leaving graffiti-scarred buildings topped by crosses as poignant religious relics of another era.”⁴³

It is critical to recall the transition that occurred in black urban neighborhoods during the mid and late twentieth century. As African Americans took advantage of economic opportunity in northern cities they created small businesses, churches, clubs, newspapers, voluntary organizations, and other intermediate institutions that provided critical social and economic capital that could buffer the vulnerabilities of any individual or family within the community. These institutions also linked African Americans to larger society and facilitated the development of the civil rights movement. As their classic *Black Metropolis* made clear, St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton detailed how African Americans built social and economic success within the confines of a white culture that continuously denied blacks occupational, residential, and social mobility.⁴⁴ White ignorance of this history of struggle reinscribes the devaluation of black culture and life made by segregation in the first place.

Deindustrialization, urban disinvestment by business and government (at all levels), redlining, development of highways, and out-migration of middle classes all combined to rip apart the vertical class integration of African American urban neighborhoods. This transition meant the loss of vertical class integration, the loss of positive economic function, and the loss of critical buffering institutions. As Loic Waquant and William Julius Wilson emphasize, formerly healthy African American urban neighborhoods marked by diverse and robust institutions have transitioned to jobless, economically drained neighborhoods marked most notably by state bureaucracies (predominantly welfare and criminal justice) and liquor stores.⁴⁵

While every historical period isolated African Americans, and every period is marked by different forms of white economic dominance, the character of hyper-incarceration is perhaps most chilling to the extent that African American protest and revolt has been effectively silenced. Drawing upon Du Bois' insight into the intraracial class conflict between middle-class African Americans who distance themselves from their more vulnerable brethren, Waquant contends that a depoliticization of the race question has led to the "courteous silence" of the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Black Congressional Caucus on hyper-incarceration. Alexander also sadly notes how civil rights organizations and middle-class African Americans have not made hyper-incarceration a political priority.⁴⁶ In relation to white racism, middle-class African Americans are in a bind between being associated with black criminality and being defined as an exceptional class that proves that anyone can economically advance in America. The critical point is that the urban subproletariat has been effectively

mutated by hyper-incarceration and poverty. White insouciance only compounds the moral scandal of the deadly symbiosis.

Goldberg attests how desegregation never really stood a chance. It did not stand a chance because civil rights policies never explicitly dismantled the structural advantages of white Americans. Harris makes this point in terms of how white Americans and the law effectively block affirmative action. While white Americans claim to embrace fairness, removal of privilege has been actively rejected legally and socially. Harris cites the fact that white-controlled institutions *expect* that they have the right to determine the meaning of norms for those who have been historically oppressed.⁴⁷ The Supreme Court has affirmed the right of the state to define who is white, while the Court has never defined whiteness itself, and simultaneously denies racial minority communities to be defined as a group. Harris explains how the Supreme Court has defended the power and privilege of white institutions:

The Supreme Court's rejection of affirmative action programs on the grounds that race-conscious remedial measures are unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment—the very constitutional measure designed to guarantee equality for Blacks—is based on the Court's chronic refusal to dismantle the institutional protection of benefits for whites that have been based on white supremacy and maintained at the expense of Blacks.

In other words, the parameters of appropriate remedies, Harris explains, are not decided by the “scope of the injury to the subjugated, but by the extent of the infringement on settled expectations of whites.”⁴⁸ The property interest of whites is a critical way that redress of historic discrimination is avoided and white privilege maintained. Put another way, the distributive justice claims of African Americans have never been addressed. Harris rightly argues that corrective justice demands that “compensation should be paid to [those] harmed and it should be paid by [those] who caused the harm.”⁴⁹

The irony here is that when whites are asked to put a price tag on the cost of becoming African American they would likely demand significant compensation. Andrew Hacker explored this possibility with a group of white students who were asked how much money they would seek if they were changed from white to black. “‘Most seemed to feel that it would not be out of place to ask for \$50 million, or \$1 million for each coming black year.’”⁵⁰ Whether or not this figure represents an accurate amortization of the cost of being black in America, Harris

concludes that there is no question that whites perceive a high value to being white.

The degree to which whites value whiteness becomes apparent through contemporary white resegregation. Although contemporary resegregation is not explicitly justified by white supremacy but by an “informal apartness,”⁵¹ ostensibly the consequence of private preferences rather than institutionalized racism, whites self-segregate more than any other group. Yet these private preferences, Goldberg explains, are hardly naive and reflect the structuring of white dominance. The fact that whites will move away from a neighborhood that reaches 18–20 percent persons of color, and prefer to live in areas that are 80 percent white, belies the claim that housing preferences are a private affair.⁵² The history of recent resegregation demonstrates that no other group self-segregates like whites and no other group maintains disproportionate advantages of housing and school re-segregation.

Nevertheless, the mainstream press uncritically—and perhaps unsurprisingly—heralded a recent study by the Manhattan Institute that celebrated the “the end of residential segregation.”⁵³ Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute counters that the study “uses a measure that masks other important trends,” including the intensification of segregation and poverty in urban neighborhoods since 2000 and the disproportionate impacts of the foreclosure crisis on African American and Latino communities.⁵⁴ The Manhattan Institute study was also imprecise in the way that it only sorted black and nonblack segregation, leaving out specific groups including white Hispanics, Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans, and Asians. By sorting only black and nonblack, the Manhattan Institute study inflates the progress of integration and ignores how housing segregation impacts Latinos, Asians, and African Americans. The Urban Institute provides a more complex mapping of integration levels in its ranking of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States showing both where integration has been successful and where resegregation is a challenge.⁵⁵ Sociologists John R. Brown and Brian J. Stults provide a helpful graph entitled “Diversity Experienced in Each Group’s Typical Neighborhood” that demonstrates how whites remain the most self-segregating group in the United States today.⁵⁶

Some critics may reply that African Americans have reaped advantages from civil rights legislation. After all, Civil Rights Fair Housing legislation successfully increased African American homeownership from one in three in 1950 to one in two by 2000. Americans should celebrate this achievement. However, nationally, whites are more

likely to gain homeownership, are able to acquire more home equity over a lifetime, and will own a home earlier in life than people of color.⁵⁷ The real estate mantra “location, location, location” effectively means “white location, white location, white location.” White location means living 20–30 years longer, and enjoying significantly higher levels of health, wealth, and education than communities of color.

“It is zip code, not DNA” that makes the difference according to recent studies of race and place. More accurately, it is the relationship between zip codes that makes a difference of how long you live. Through its Place Matters initiative, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies “seeks to build the capacity of community leaders to address social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape health and health outcomes” in 14 cities across the United States (go to <http://www.jointcenter.org/hpi/pages/place-matters>). For example, life expectancy in the poorest zip code in New Orleans (70112), predominantly African American, is 54.5 years, or 25.5 years lower than life expectancy in the zip code with the least amount of poverty in the city, where it is 80 and predominantly white (70124). The Place Matters New Orleans study found a wide difference across census tracts in the community-level risk index, which was calculated by combining measures of population below 150 percent of the federal poverty level, the number of overcrowded households, households without a vehicle, and the extent of vacant housing. African American neighborhoods with the highest risk indexes have 1 ½ times the mortality rate as for white zip codes, the lowest levels of educational attainment (as many as 72 percent of residents without a high school degree), the higher violent crime rates, and higher rates of incarceration.⁵⁸

The linkage between homeownership and the relative valuing of whiteness over blackness is well-established because whites will own a home earlier in life and gain more home equity over a lifetime than people of color.⁵⁹ The economist Edward Wolff’s review of social scientific studies found that the relatively higher proportion of whites’ initial wealth derives from inheritances and gifts (including homes).⁶⁰ At age 25, nearly 40 percent of whites and fewer than 20 percent of nonwhites are homeowners. By age 35, nearly 80 percent of whites own their own home, compared with less than half of nonwhites. More importantly, whites are 2.65 times more likely than nonwhites to achieve \$50,000 in home equity, 3.9 times more likely to achieve \$100,000, and 6.15 times more likely to achieve \$200,000 in home equity.⁶¹

Critics may counter that the issue is class, because African Americans have made gains in wealth and homeownership. However, even the wealthiest African American communities lack access to the opportunities available in predominantly white neighborhoods. Current levels of segregation mean that the “most advantaged African American areas are no better off than the typical white neighborhood,” while “the ‘worst’ urban neighborhoods” where “whites reside are considerably better off than those of the average black community.”⁶² People of color find it increasingly difficult to translate economic gains into neighborhood quality, especially because of reverse redlining.

“Reverse redlining” is the new name of the game in housing and lending discrimination in the twenty-first century. Where historic redlining prevented home and business loans from entering communities of color, reverse redlining extracts economic assets from communities of color. Reverse redlining occurs through multiple channels, including subprime loans, foreclosures, and the unmitigated impacts of foreclosures in communities of color. Institutional discrimination in housing and lending markets is one highly significant way that racial segregation maintains wealth and health gaps well into the future. Reverse redlining erases gains made by African Americans and Latinos over the last several decades.⁶³

The Center for Responsible Lending (CRL) finds that African American and Latino borrowers are more likely to receive higher-rate subprime loans than white borrowers, even when studies are controlled for legitimate risk factors.⁶⁴ The majority of families who lost homes to foreclosure between 2007 and 2009 were non-Hispanic whites. However, CRL finds that African American and Latino communities suffered the most devastating consequences of the foreclosure crisis. Between 2009 and 2012, CRL’s study estimates that the financial losses that result from foreclosures because of depreciation to nearby properties mean losses of “194 billion and 177 billion respectively, will have been drained from African American and Latino communities in these indirect ‘spillover’ losses alone.”⁶⁵

Housing segregation thereby contributes significantly to the resegregation of the nation’s schools, another key institution where racial inequalities are extended into the future. Recall that the US Supreme Court declared in 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that school segregation is unconstitutional and “inherently unequal.” Over 50 years since that historic decision, resegregation demonstrates that white students remain the most segregated from all other races in their schools. Whites on average attend schools where less than

20 percent of the students are from all other racial and ethnic groups combined. On average, blacks and Latinos attend schools with 53–55 percent students of their own group.⁶⁶

Gary Orfield finds that “research consistently shows that segregated schools are usually isolated by both race and poverty, and offer vastly unequal educational opportunities.”⁶⁷ The Supreme Court’s 2007 decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 et al.* dealt a stunning blow to the previous 50 years of desegregation efforts by striking down two voluntary school district desegregation plans, holding that individual students may not be assigned or denied a school on the basis of race.⁶⁸ This is an example of Harris’s point that the Supreme Court denies any right of oppressed groups to redress inequality *as a group* while effectively protecting the long-standing privilege of whites.

WHITE HABITUS AND THE FOUR WALLS OF WHITE IMPRISONMENT

The sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains how white habitus, or white socialization, creates intragroup identity and cohesion. He defines white habitus as “a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites’ tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions, and their views on racial matters.”⁶⁹ White habitus occurs within a separate residential and cultural life that fosters a white culture of solidarity and negative views about nonwhites. White habitus includes both position, described throughout this chapter in terms of the historical social geography, location, and power of whiteness, and practice, the ways whites live and are socialized to perceive and act within the world. In other words, white self-segregation is a critical incubator for white internalization of white superiority and black inferiority.

Even in the face of pervasive racial inequality, many whites continue to believe that people of color do not face significant disadvantage, and even place blame on people of color for these disparities. The anthropologist Jane Hill explains how racism persists in white “folk theory,” or “common sense” knowledge that takes things for granted as if the way things are is natural.⁷⁰ Hill uncovers how white folk theory erases what is really important, attends to the irrelevant, and creates pitfalls in the face of contradiction.

Hill uncovers three premises that most whites tend to maintain through everyday language and socialization. First, white folk theory holds that race is a biologically valid category. This assumption

persists even though anthropologists and geneticists long ago demonstrated that there is only one race, the human race. An example of how this nonscientific, white, “common sense” assumption persists is found in the argument that interracial marriage will erase racial difference and conflict. In other words, the “common sense” assumption advances a genetic solution to a nonscientific, social construction. Hill cites numerous articles in the news media that treat the scientific consensus as an “astonishing novelty,” as if the “common sense” assumption held scientific validity.⁷¹ A second key assumption of white folk theory holds that racism is entirely a matter of individual belief and that individual ignorance can be corrected by education. This view is commonly communicated in opinion pieces that rightfully desire an end to racism and decry the use of racial epithets. However, this white individualist assumption renders opaque, if not invisible, the structural relations of domination-subordination that give rise to hyper-incarceration in the first place.⁷²

A third key assumption of white folk or “common sense” theory is that prejudice is part of the human condition, a view commonly described by whites in the statement that “all people prefer to be with people who are like them.”⁷³ Hill points to the enormity of white power and its distortion in the ways that whites deny structural inequality to shore up legitimacy for housing and school resegregation since the civil rights movement. Hill elucidates how he “white cultural projects” that maintain this distortion are not marginal or archaic. They are an active, productive, and dynamic contemporary reality that shapes the beliefs and behavior of whites in every sphere of life, and that produces the racial reality in which they, and the populations of color subordinated within this reality, must live.⁷⁴

White habitus builds its own prison that is residential, cultural, relational, and institutional. Joseph Barndt, a parish pastor who has devoted his life to helping whites understand and dismantle their role in racism, especially through his work with the antiracist Crossroads Ministry, describes how whites imprison themselves within four walls of whiteness. Barndt names these walls (1) separation and isolation; (2) illusion and delusion; (3) amnesia and anesthesia, and (4) power and privilege.⁷⁵

The First Wall: Separation and Isolation

Francis Cardinal George, archbishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, in his pastoral letter *Dwell in My Love* calls residential hypersegregation

spatial racism. Cardinal George states that spatial racism creates a “visible chasm between rich and poor, and between whites and people of color.”⁷⁶ Bonilla-Silva’s ethnographies of white students and professionals reveal how whites tend to view this chasm as normal and natural.⁷⁷

The scandal is that whites’ self-isolation keeps them from understanding or feeling empathy for people of color. The sociologists Hernan Vera and Joe Feagin call this reality of whites’ lack of cross-racial empathy as “social alexithymia,” that is, “the sustained inability of a great many whites to understand where African Americans and other people of color are coming from and what their racialized experiences are like.”⁷⁸ It is doubly scandalous because segregation physically delimits whites’ intellectual, emotional, and moral horizons as whites live the lie that they are humanly superior to their brothers and sisters of color who suffer the deadly consequences of the symbiosis between prisons and poor neighborhoods.

The Second Wall: Illusion and Delusion

Lack of cross-racial empathy indicates the illusion of innocence under which whites live. Ethnographic studies of how whites describe their own experience demonstrate that within white gated communities, white self-perceptions of “niceness” and fear of others is used as a rhetorical way to justify living in a residential development that excludes racial others.⁷⁹ More importantly, when whites describe themselves as “nice” and nurture fear of others, they inscribe racial assumptions into the landscape. Although the physical landscape and the perceptions that whites use to describe the landscape are socially constructed, this reality is seen as normal and is out of whites’ everyday awareness. Thus, for example, within the white habitus, a white neighborhood is normal, while a black neighborhood is “racially segregated.”⁸⁰ In other words, white habitus constitutes a racially biased intellectual and moral horizon that defines, controls, and segregates different, other, nonwhite bodies.

Thus Bonilla-Silva explains that white hyper—segregation from blacks “does not provide fertile soil upon which primary interracial associations can flourish, regardless of blacks’ level of assimilation” and despite whites’ self-professed support for interracial associations.⁸¹ The perverse irony is that whites tend to assume racial innocence as we support public policies, laws, and social and economic practices that create the deadly symbiosis between prison and impoverished urban neighborhoods.

The Third Wall: Amnesia and Anesthesia

The perversity of white habitus becomes more apparent in the ways memory is deployed selectively to deny the historical reality and consequences of white racism throughout US history. For example, in her ethnography of the Gullah/Geechee along coastal South Carolina, Melissa D. Hargrove demonstrates how white habitus, through the deployment of a wide collection of adaptable techniques, create a “forced amnesia” that erases Gullah/Geechee culture and its historical contribution to the economic development of the United States.⁸² She demonstrates how contemporary economic development of gated communities, resorts, and heritage tourism serve as “contemporary re-colonization efforts.”⁸³ She calls this process “the re-invention of the plantation” because the erasure of the “Gullah/Geechee culture is softened” as heritage tourism conveniently forgets that the Gullah/Geechee cultural knowledge of rice production was exploited to build one of the wealthiest planter classes in US history.⁸⁴

Hargrove listened to former residents of Ansonborough, an African American neighborhood in downtown Charleston, who related how their homes were demolished in 1992 to make way for a white economic development. One hundred and sixty African American families were relocated to peripheral areas of Charleston. Charleston’s revitalization effort also eviscerated a healthy African American business district.

White historic preservation preserves white culture at the expense of African American heritage. Citizens constantly reminded Hargrove that the Cannon Street YMCA, among the oldest black YMCAs nationally, survived 137 years in Charleston until 2006 when it was merged with the white YMCA. Black citizens were attached not so much to a building as a black cultural institution that helped them survive since 1869. Yet this “intangible” heritage was erased by white economic development.

Hargrove further explains that African American efforts in 1995 to celebrate the legacy of Denmark Vesey, the mastermind behind the 1822 planned slave uprising in Charleston to kill whites, steal ships, and sail to the black Republic of Haiti were effectively squashed. A Citadel history professor declared “that the movement to valorize Vesey” was “a product of our obsession with race,” and explained that he “was not overly enthusiastic about erecting a monument to a man bound and determined to create mayhem.”⁸⁵ Yet Vesey’s planned uprising represents a critical moment in slave resistance to white oppression that “betrays the white myth of the ‘happy Southern

Negro.’”⁸⁶ Hargrove concludes that Vesey is not worthy for white Charleston because “his significance can never be legitimized within the habitus of white racism.”⁸⁷

This is only one example of what Charles W. Mills describes as the “officially sanctioned reality” of the white racial contract. “White misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception,” Mills explains, “are in no way accidental but *prescribed* by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity.”⁸⁸ The perversity of white racism and habitus is that “whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”⁸⁹

This officially sanctioned evasion and self-deception, in the case of Charleston’s efforts to capitalize off of historic tourism, is exemplified by “one golden rule: do not offend the White visitor!”⁹⁰ In other words, maintain the myth of Southern gentility, slave passivity, and inferiority, and remember plantations as sites of white entrepreneurial expertise. This white amnesia erases Gullah/Geechee culture and contributions as it displaces their contemporary communities.

The Fourth Wall: Power and Privilege

White self-segregation physically, socially, and morally structures the societal relationship between privilege and oppression. As the theologian M. Shawn Copeland explains:

A white racially bias-induced horizon defines, censors, controls and segregates different, other, non-white bodies. Ordinarily these bodies are “invisible” in the processes of historical, cultural, and social creativity and representation, but should these non-white bodies step “out of place,” they are subordinated literally to surveillance, inspection, discrimination, assessment, and containment.⁹¹

The power and privilege of whiteness is in its uncanny resemblance to previous patterns of US white dominance. Wacquant wonders whether or not we may be the first genuine prison society.⁹² We are a genuine prison society inasmuch as hyper-incarceration provides a window into the imprisonment of white soul and culture. As the Yugoslavian dissident Milovan Djilas put it, the way prisons are run and prisoners are treated “gives a faithful picture of a society, especially of the ideas and methods of those who dominate that society.”⁹³ As per Loury, whites can only shift responsibility to black and brown people by irresponsibly and immorally denying our own.

Whites directly and indirectly contribute to a death-dealing system. First, a white carceral archipelago and culture equates blackness with criminality. A white-dominated legal system effectively protects, indeed renders invisible, unconscious racism on behalf of police, prosecutors, and judges as it stigmatizes blacks. Second, white law excludes ex-offenders from public aid resources and access to higher education, effectively closing opportunity for a better life. Third, disproportionate sentencing separates spouses, removes parents from children, and creates a new form of natal alienation, to use Orlando Patterson's descriptive term for the impact of the slave trade, and eviscerates subsidiary institutions that might ease transition to mainstream life. Fourth, denial of the right to vote effectively imposes civic death. Fifth, not unlike the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow, prisons extract low-cost or no-cost labor from a predominantly African American and Latino population as they sustain local white communities. Finally, all of these combine to institutionalize and naturalize a centuries-old association of blackness with criminality and whiteness with innocence.

CONCLUSION

The problem of white habitus and hyper-segregation is that it is a dynamic site for the reproduction of white dominance and hyper-incarceration within the power dynamics of the neighborhood, state, and nation. The mechanisms of white habitus include physical, social, and moral distancing from people of color, as well as denial of whites' self-sense of racial superiority, fear of racialized others, and intrawhite solidarity. This home of whiteness and its practices structure the deadly symbiosis between prison and urban ghetto. Perhaps more significantly, the profound evil of whiteness concerns whites' lack of empathy for people of color and the inability to perceive how whites need people of color to become fully human and open to transformation in God's love. Before we turn to Margaret Pfeil's exploration of a spirituality of white resistance to hyper-incarceration, however, Laurie Cassidy draws us in part II into a deeper analysis of the role of white culture in a prison society.

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PART II



CULTURE

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CHAPTER 3



THE MYTH OF THE DANGEROUS BLACK MAN

Laurie Cassidy

The black male is purely a figment of the white imagination. He is no more real than the emperor's new clothes. Like the therapist who takes the delusional patient back to the moment of trauma when the delusions began, we must take ourselves back to the point where our national trauma, slavery began. It was within the dark interiority of this experience, the womb of slavery itself, that the black male was conceived.

D. Marvin Jones¹

What does it mean that “the black male” is purely a figment of white imagination? This chapter will address this question as critical to understanding hyper-incarceration in America. Interrogating the representation of black male bodies within American culture is key to understanding how we make meaning of this scandalous social reality, how it has become “common sense.”² American culture legitimizes the prison system by imprinting, even branding, on our imagination the deep-seated myth of the “dangerous black man.”

In this chapter I will explore the cultural production of the “dangerous black man.” I will demonstrate how the myth of the dangerous black man was created and suggest how it has been recycled in American cultural lore continuously since the inception of slavery. I will argue that the myth of the dangerous black man undergirds hyper-incarceration. This cultural production of evil is essential to the

functioning and maintenance of hyper-incarceration as we know it in America, and is a continuation of the dynamics of slavery and Jim Crow laws. As Michelle Alexander explains,

The process of marking black youth *as* black criminals is essential to the functioning of mass incarceration as a racial caste system. For the system to succeed . . . black people must be labeled as criminals, before they are formally subject to control. The criminal label is essential, for forms of explicit racial exclusion are not only prohibited but widely condemned. Thus black youth must be made—labeled—criminals. This process of being made a criminal is, to a large extent, the process of “becoming” black.³

To interrogate the cultural production of this myth of the dangerous black man I invite the reader into a thought experiment. Imagine you are walking down a dark city street at night and three young black men come walking toward you. What do you do as these young black men approach? How do you feel as they walk by on the sidewalk? What do you do as they pass you?

As you see these young black men in your mind’s eye in this scene, I ask you to honestly think about how you imagine this scenario. First, thinking about the scenario how do you see these three young men in dress, appearance, and demeanor? If you are a white person reading these lines ask yourself if you would feel apprehensive or frightened. Do you make eye contact and say “hello” or do you keep your eyes focused on the ground? Do you imagine that they are carrying weapons? Are you afraid that they might mug you? And do you feel guilty that you even feel this way? After seeing these young men do you feel more vulnerable to physical harm and are you more alert to your surroundings? If you feel scared you are not alone. As a middle-aged white woman who is relatively small in stature my first reaction is to be apprehensive in this scenario. However, let’s consider that our reactions to these young black men are not based on a previous experience of endangerment but are something we have “learned.” No one has to say, “be afraid of young black men!” because most images we see in contemporary culture have taught us all to see black men as dangerous. The profile of the dangerous black man is constantly paraded before our eyes in the crime stories of the evening news, on prime-time detective stories like “Law and Order,” in “reality” television shows such as “Lockdown” or “Oz.” Moreover, this image is part of our inheritance as Americans. As James Baldwin writes, “The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is present in all we do.”⁴

This thought experiment provides a context for my work in this chapter because it makes conscious and explicit the way cultural representations are operative “at a preconscious or nonrational level that escapes personal awareness.”⁵ In deconstructing the myth of the dangerous black man I will be elaborating upon the definition of white privilege and racism as a cultural phenomenon. With Bryan Massingale, “I contend that racism is a deeply entrenched symbol system of meanings and values attached to skin color that provides group identity, shapes personal consciousness, and justifies the existence of race-based economic, social and political disparities.”⁶ As Massingale has pointed out, for Catholic social teaching to adequately address racism and white privilege its approach must be systemic. “This means approaching this social evil as a cultural phenomenon, that is, an underlying color symbol system that . . . shapes not only behavior, but also one’s identity and consciousness.”⁷

The reality of hyper-incarceration hinges on the maintenance of the (re)mythologizing of black men as dangerous, criminal, and guilty. When white people are asked to honestly admit their fears and behavior in the thought experiment of walking down the street at night, we often offer a host of replies. For example, “it’s dark, who wouldn’t be scared of crime at night in the city!” or “even if it were young white or Hispanic kids, I would still be scared!” On the surface because we live in a violent society these comments seem quite reasonable.⁸ But on deeper reflection such responses are an evasion of the task of understanding our personal and collective complicity in creating and maintaining racist culture. My work within this chapter will demonstrate this cultural process of production not as something—out there—but in us.⁹ To confront hyper-incarceration entails honestly acknowledging “the picture in our heads.”

THE “PICTURE IN OUR HEADS”

*My body came back to me flattened out, disjointed, mourning on that white winter day. The Negro is a beast, the Negro is evil, the Negro is mischievous, the Negro is ugly; look a Negro, it is cold outside, the Negro is shaking because he is cold, the boy is shaking because he is afraid of the Negro, the Negro is shaking with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome boy is shaking because he thinks the Negro is shaking with anger, the white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: Mommy the Negro is going to eat me.*¹⁰

Franz Fanon’s description offers a darkly luminous insight into the psychosocial dynamic of the myth of the dangerous black man.

Fanon's experience details a path to exploring how the myth of the dangerous black man functions within white imagination. My focus as a white woman is on what we, as white people, can understand about hyper-incarceration by reflecting upon the reaction of the white child to Fanon, the black man. I take my cue here from the work of Emilie Townes. In *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Townes describes the "deep interior material life of evil and its manifestations."¹¹ Drawing upon the work of Foucault and Gramsci, she describes these inner workings in the powerful and privileged as "fantastic hegemonic imagination."¹² This collective hegemonic imagination "sets in motion whirlwinds of images used in the cultural production of evil."¹³ These images must be made conscious and examined because they condition how we see ourselves, others, and the world. As Townes notes, no one in America can escape this cultural dynamic. "None of us can escape it, for it is the deep cultural coding we live with in US society."¹⁴ To dismantle the structures of hyper-incarceration it is necessary to "engage in a conscious dialogue/interaction among the self, the community, and the society within a global culture."¹⁵

The scenario Fanon describes not only illustrates the content of this picture of the dangerous black man, but also reveals how this picture acts as knowledge for the white "viewer." In Fanon's encounter he is seen and unseen. The white child's interpretation becomes what is real, and the child acts in fear upon this by running for safety to his mother. Fanon is invisible as a unique human being, but is seen *as* the picture in the little white child's mind. What is key to understanding this encounter is the invisible and unspoken context of white power and privilege that in seeing black bodies conditions white people to assume we know black people. White privilege gives us the power to name and define black men without ever having to speak to individual human beings.¹⁶ The point is as white people we never question the validity of the pictures in our heads, we take them as a facts about reality. These pictures become the unspoken, unacknowledged, and unquestioned basis of relations, both personal and political.

Massingale describes the heart of white privilege as the power to define what is normative, while also as white people never questioning (or having to question) our frame of reference.¹⁷ Massingale deftly describes the white standpoint,

White culture is a perspective that measures, but is seldom measured; studies, but is rarely studied; analyzes, but is not often analyzed; evaluates, but is typically not evaluated.¹⁸

The power of this stance is what conditions us to take for granted our vision of reality *as* reality. The problem is this mediated knowledge of the world is rooted in what Shawn Copeland calls the “ocular epistemological illusion.”¹⁹ This illusion “equates knowing with simply looking at that which is visible.”²⁰ The problem with the visual as a basis for knowledge is that “[s]uch a foundation for knowing is easily seduced to support the Eurocentric aesthetic ‘normative gaze’ with its attendant racist, sexist, imperialist, and pornographic connotations.”²¹ In other words, the illusion of our white standpoint is that the knowledge generated from our viewpoint is reality, not a mediated picture of reality. Our gaze is inherently privileged because we are socialized to assume a universalizing capacity in knowing the world, without accounting for any of the layers of mediation that have created the representation before our eyes.

Having pictures in our minds of people we encounter is part of the ordinary functioning of our thinking minds. The problem, as we see in Fanon’s encounter, is the unmarked, invisible power of whiteness, which assumes the mental picture is reality and acts accordingly. As Iris Marion Young argues, systems of oppression persist in part “through interactive habits, unconscious assumptions and stereotypes, and group related feelings of nervousness or aversion.”²² White privilege and racism in America today are not primarily enacted through laws that define black people as unequal to white people. As Young describes:

Group oppressions are enacted in this society not primarily in official laws and policies but in informal, unnoticed and unreflective speech, bodily reactions to others, conventional practices of everyday interaction and evaluation, aesthetic judgments, and the jokes, images and stereotypes pervading the mass media.²³

In this section I will explore the pictures in our minds and how these pictures are integral to how white people “see” the bodies of black men. Drawing upon Young’s work on moral responsibility, I will suggest that these affective experiences are “moral phenomena” that indicate our white complicity in hyper-incarceration.²⁴ To interrogate these experiences as moral phenomena is an imperative for white people. As we see in the recent events surrounding Trayvon Martin’s murder, our knowledge of each other based upon these pictures has deadly consequences.

Walter Lippmann coined the descriptive term “pictures in our heads.” His concept of stereotype is simple yet also profound; he describes it as the “pictures in our heads.”²⁵ According to Lippmann,

the stereotype “precedes reason” and “as a form of perception imposes a certain character on the data of the senses.”²⁶ This picture in our heads works as a stereotype to the degree that it conditions the beholder to see “the other”.²⁷

Lippmann’s concept helps us to step back and see the “pictures in our heads” as a *picture* not as a real person. What makes this picture so powerful is that it operates before we can even think rationally about its content. The picture in our imagination “imposes” or interprets what we see with our eyes. This picture in our head functions automatically and unconsciously without critical reflection or examination. Though Lippmann’s idea is very helpful to begin to understand the little white boy’s reaction to Fanon’s blackness, there are more socio-historical factors operative in how the picture of the dangerous black man functions with this encounter.

In his book *The Hidden Brain*, Shankar Vendatam explains how these pictures function in everyday life and interaction.²⁸ Like Lippmann, Vendatam describes human beings as hard-wired “to form associations between people and concepts.”²⁹ To form associations is part of normal brain functioning, but *what associations* we make are not biological but are the result of cultural conditioning. What is helpful in Vendatam’s work is that he distinguishes between brain functioning and social conditioning. He also raises the question about how we understand the modes of mind in which these pictures operate. Vendatam observes that these mental pictures are often the function of a less conscious and automatic response, not conscious and intentional. Vendatam believes that we need to reconsider ourselves to be “conscious, intentional and deliberate creatures.”³⁰

It appears that racist associations are far less consciously formed, and require much more conscious interrogation. For example, Vendatam cites a Canadian research study conducted with children as young as three years. In this study, the children were already creating racial categories and “linked white faces with positive attributes and black faces with negative attributes.”³¹ Vendatam argues that we rely too much on conscious formation regarding attitudes toward issues of race, when our unconscious messages are a much more powerful influence. He observes that teachers and parents can explicitly and repeatedly teach tolerance but “there are many hundreds of implicit messages of racial bias that children absorb through culture—whether it’s television, books or the attitudes of the adults and kids around them And it’s these hidden associations that essentially determine what happens in the unconscious minds of these children.”³²

In her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young brings the pictures in the personal unconscious into sharper political focus. She situates the experience of these mental pictures and associations that arise into the context of oppression. Referring to the opening quotation from Fanon, Young claims what happened to Fanon “cannot be reduced to capitalist processes or encompassed within the structures of oppression.”³³ To speak of *structures* of oppression does fully account for what is happening in this interaction. Regarding Fanon’s experience we can’t only say, “this is just racism.” The encounter between this little boy and Fanon needs to be described and accounted for more adequately in order to understand the connection between systems of oppression and personal experience.³⁴ This little boy’s aversion and fear are the affective way that these larger systems and structures of oppression “make sense” and are internalized.

Young’s work creates a bridge between the systems of oppression that often appear to white people as abstract and conceptual—out there—and the experience of our thoughts, feelings, and bodies as we encounter people who are not like us.

Many people are quite consciously committed to equality and respect for women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and disabled people, and nevertheless in their bodies and feeling reactions of aversion or avoidance toward members of those groups. People suppress such reactions from their discursive consciousness.³⁵

According to Young it is a struggle to talk about experience of aversion because we are socialized to privilege reason and dismiss bodily experience and affectivity as irrelevant to knowledge of the world. In addition, she writes, “the liberal imperative that differences should make no difference puts a sanction of silence on those things which at the level of practical consciousness people ‘know’ about the significance of group differences.”³⁶

As Young describes, I may be consciously committed to all people being equal, and to universal principles of justice and fairness. But encountering a black man I may have feelings in my body of aversion, fear, avoidance, and discomfort, which it is a struggle to honestly acknowledge, openly talk about, and explore consciously. What is so helpful to note and disturbing to see regarding Fanon’s experience is that he is not a young black man, it is not a dark street at night, and this little boy is not alone. As Fanon shivers in the cold, the little boy imagines Fanon as angry enough to attack him (and

eat him!).³⁷ Though we may be tempted to dismiss this reaction as just that of an impolite little boy with an active imagination, this white child is saying what many of us have been socialized not to speak.³⁸

Young notes, “Public etiquette demands that we relate to people as individuals only.”³⁹ According to Young, US laws have made it illegal to discriminate against any person because race. Corporations and large institutions in America have policies stating commitment to equal opportunity and formal equality. “Explicit discrimination and exclusion are forbidden by the formal rules of our society for most groups in most situations.”⁴⁰ Though sanctioned against publically and legally, the repressed and unspoken aversion is operative in all kinds of decision making and judgments. As Young explains, “Aversion or devaluation of certain groups is displaced onto a judgment of character or competence supposedly unconnected with group attributes.”⁴¹

Mikulich’s research qualifies Young’s observations about the operation of discrimination in US law. He demonstrates that Young’s statement about the law as forbidding explicit exclusion is strangely true, and not true. As Mikulich has so deftly shown *explicit* exclusion is legally forbidden and simultaneously, the systems and structures of exclusion have become more reified. For example, it is still illegal for a white realtor to tell a black person they cannot purchase a specific property. However, the discriminatory operations of the law and the economy make this personal interaction unnecessary. This “shape-shifting” and re-racialization of exclusion do not negate Young’s point. Mikulich’s research implies that the systemic re-entrenchment of discrimination may make it even more difficult to name and take responsibility for the repressed and unspoken aversion that Young describes.

Drawing upon the research of Lippmann Vendatam, and Young reveals the imperative for us, as white people, to turn away from black men as the problem of hyper-incarceration. This turn involves white people taking responsibility for who we are, and our embodied experience of the world. How are we to take responsibility for feelings, thoughts, and bodily reactions, which are often barely conscious? Young observes that moral philosophy, and I would add Catholic moral theology, sees the moral life as “conscious, deliberate, a rational weighing of alternatives.”⁴² For white people to ignore the pictures in our heads and how they function in daily life is to “excuse some of the most important sources of oppression.”⁴³

Only moral judgment that extends to habitual interaction, bodily reactions, unthinking speech, feelings, and symbolic associations can capture much about such oppression.⁴⁴

Young contends that we cannot be blamed for such experience, but we must take responsibility for it. According to Young, blame is an action that looks backward, while responsibility looks forward.

Calling on agents to take responsibility for their actions, habits, feelings, attitudes, images, and associations, on the other hand is forward-looking; it asks the person “from here on out” to submit such unconscious behavior to reflection, to work to change habits and attitudes.⁴⁵

Young defines responsibility here as submitting our “unconscious behavior to reflection, to work to change habits and attitudes.”⁴⁶ Some in our society may balk at this definition and argue that this is a more stringent form of being “politically correct.” Critics of Young’s approach may see this as “thought Nazis”—“What?! Now I can’t even think my own thoughts or feel my own feelings!” Young’s suggestion does not imply censoring our thoughts and feelings, but rather reflecting upon them as a way to understand ourselves as embodied—historical—social beings. Submitting our unconscious behavior to reflection is not a therapeutic turn, but is a moral step in making visible the construction of our white self. Building upon Vendatam’s insight, such a moral step is humbly recognizing that our reactions to people are far less conscious, rational, and deliberate. Rather than remaining unmarked and invisible, our gaze upon others is now marked and visible for inquiry.

The work of Lippmann, Vendatam, and Young offer us an account of how our thoughts and feelings indicate social relations and their enactment in everyday experience. The idea of the autonomous, atomistic self is a concept that keeps us blind to these relationships. As white people, our refusal to explore our experience is a willful ignorance of the reality in which we live, and from which we benefit. Moreover, this concept of the self is not only a “distortion of social reality but also eras[es] accountability.”⁴⁷ One step in taking responsibility for the pictures in our heads is in understanding their historical origin. So where does this picture of dangerous black men come from? To answer this question we need to unravel the history of chattel slavery to understand how the myth of the dangerous black man was conceived. To trace this image is to unravel how dominant white society legitimized the institution of slavery. Understanding this history

will give us clues into how this history is imprinted in the pictures in our heads.

SLAVERY AND THE MYTH OF THE DANGEROUS BLACK MAN

Today, most whites, myself included, would feel very uncomfortable in a totally black neighborhood, particularly at night. So the fear is not irrational.

Former mayor of New York, Ed Koch⁴⁸

This observation by Ed Koch brings us back to the thought experiment that began this chapter. Koch's remarks are instructive for a number of reasons. As mayor of New York, why would he be uncomfortable in an all-black neighborhood? Wouldn't many of the people in the neighborhood have voted for him? The assumption is a black neighborhood is a place of danger and physical threat—to white people, even if you are the mayor of New York. As D. Marvin Jones contends, because Koch was white and “an educated, upper-class liberal, this racism, appears, well, justified.”⁴⁹ Koch's comments make the myth of the dangerous black man appear as an objective fact. “We are dealing with a set of stories so deeply imbedded in our language that they are accepted as known facts.”⁵⁰ To have the mayor of New York admit to a fear of “black crime” at night and also claim that the fear is rational lends legitimacy that suggests the myth of the dangerous black man is not simply a personal stereotype, but rather an element of our collective ideology as Americans. These comments by Koch suggest the scope of the problem of this picture in our heads. The dangerous black man is less about “demonic images than a hegemonic figure.”⁵¹ In the Gramscian sense, the hegemonic figure of the dangerous black man functions to reinscribe white privilege and racism. This cultural representation of black men makes sense of relationships of dominance and subordination in our society. In this section I will explore how this “picture in our minds” develops from the hegemonic knowledge of the white slavery system.⁵²

For those of us who are white, it is likely we learned American history as a (selective) series of facts and chronological events. As Toni Morrison reminds us, *facts* can keep us from probing the *truth* of history, from allowing ourselves to enter into the interior of the memories of real persons.⁵³ Morrison explains,

[T]he crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because fact can exist without

human intelligence, but truth cannot. So I am looking to expose a truth about the interior life.⁵⁴

To turn toward the images we have of black men is to see history more deeply than facts and events but to see history as the inherited images, stories, and memories that deeply inform our collective consciousness as Americans.

Drawing upon the methodology of Townes, I will explore how imagination functions within this interplay of history and memory “to create images that buttress evil as a cultural production.”⁵⁵ In other words, my task is to interrogate how white imagination created the “idea” of black men as dangerous, and how this idea is part of a collective memory we inherit living the historical consciousness of America. My work in this section is to uncover the myth of the dangerous black man as a cultural production of evil. As Townes writes, “Exploring evil as a cultural production highlights the systemic construction of truncated narratives designed to support and perpetuate structural inequalities and forms of social oppression.”⁵⁶

The legal scholar D. Marvin Jones explains that to understand the myth of the dangerous black man, we have to go back into how black men functioned in the ideology of slavery. He explains that this myth can only be corrected by going back to the original trauma of slavery.

Like the therapist who takes the delusional patient back to the moment of trauma when the delusions began, we must take ourselves back to the point where our national trauma, slavery, began. It was within the dark interiority of this experience . . . that the black male was conceived.⁵⁷

Jones’ words are potent for the work of unraveling the history of this “picture in our heads.” Jones describes that at the origin of slavery it was necessary to have an *idea* of the black male. The idea of the black male was distinct from actual living and breathing black male persons. The trauma of slavery begins with the creation of a fiction about human beings with black skin that allows white slave owners to put black men and women into bondage. Inquiring into this fiction is one way to understand the inner workings of what Eugene Genovese describes as “the world the slaveholders made.”⁵⁸

George Fredrickson historically details how the white fiction of black human beings worked to legitimize the institution of chattel slavery. Slavery, whites argued, controlled the savage nature of black people.

The proslavery theorists had argued that the “brute” propensities of blacks were kept in check only as a result of the absolute white control made possible by slavery and the emancipation in the South would bring the same “reversion to savagery” that had allegedly taken place after blacks had been freed in Haiti and the British West Indies.⁵⁹

Fredrickson’s work highlights the ironic hypocrisy of pro-slavery’s anthropology. The lie of this anthropology claimed that black human beings were fundamentally different from white human beings. Our destiny as whites was to be free. Black humans were by nature bestial and not suited for freedom, as were white Americans. The Philadelphia Sidney George Fisher work’s *The Laws of Race, as Connected with Slavery* was published anonymously and summarized this racist anthropology. “Fisher argued that Negroes, as members of an inferior species, were naturally suited to be slaves of white masters wherever the races were in direct contact.”⁶⁰

Fredrickson maintains that the images within white slaveholders’ imagination are historically important, not only culturally significant. Within white imagination, historians of the North Atlantic slave trade document two dominant images of black males: Sambo and Nat. In white imagination Sambo was the loyal but lazy slave, while Nat was the sullen, stubborn, uncooperative angry and potentially rebellious slave.⁶¹ These two images formed a dangerous duality of Sambo as the “happy child” and Nat as the “rebellious savage.” As Ronald Takaki points out, slave owners pretended that all male slaves were like Sambo, but feared they would revolt as Nat.⁶² Fredrickson contends that these fantasies about black men say a great deal more about white slave owners than about enslaved black men. “If they tell us little that is reliable about the objects of such conceptions, they may reveal a great deal about those who hold them.”⁶³ Fredrickson explains that these two images justified dominance for whites, and legitimized the institution of chattel slavery. Sambo implied that black men had a servile nature, while Nat’s impulses suggested the need for whites to control black men. The image of Sambo reifies the idea of Nat. “It legitimizes the status of one group relative to another, but becomes the vehicle for overt and active hostility only when the subordinate group is seen as getting out of ‘its place.’”⁶⁴

As early as the writings of Thomas Jefferson slave owners document an ongoing nightmare in white imagination that slaves would rise up.⁶⁵ In the light of day, slave owners enacted the perverse fantasy of racial superiority in which they were in complete control of powerless beings they called slaves. “At night the illusion of mastery dissolved

into nightmares of powerless slaves rising up to murder [them] in [their] sleep.”⁶⁶ This racist white fantasy holds two ideas about black men; first, that white people are superior to black people and also that black people are capable and likely to overpower and violently dominate whites. This perverse fantasy at the root of slavery was a tension that created the myth of the dangerous black man.

This nightmare—for whites—became real in the slave revolt led by Nat Turner.⁶⁷ Nat Turner was born on October 2, 1800, in Southampton County, Virginia. Growing up in slavery, Turner was known to be deeply religious.⁶⁸ A practicing Christian, he regularly fasted and prayed, knew scripture, and applied it to his experience of slavery. Over a period of years Turner experienced signs and visions in nature in which he felt called to a “great work.” This work would come to be, in his own words, to “arise and prepare myself and slay my enemies with their own weapons.”⁶⁹

Unlike Sambo, the stereotype of Nat originates in the life of one actual human being: Nat Turner. The image of Nat in white imagination is what Cornel West calls psychosexual racist logic. In white imagination black men become lustful, vengeful, cruel or carefree.⁷⁰ This racist imagination creates black men into “walking abstractions.”⁷¹ As Jones argues, slave owners could conflate the actions of real black men with this fantasy of Nat because the whole project of slavery was rooted in a racial fiction. “The legal fiction that slaves were not human but property, no different than the master’s bull or mule, leads to its own twisted illogic to the fantasy that black males were beasts.”⁷²

Turner was owned by the Travis family and moved into the home of Joseph Travis in 1830. In February 1831 there was an eclipse of the sun, which Turner interpreted as a sign to gather friends, Henry, Hark, Nelson, and Sam, to plan the revolt. In the early morning hours of August 21, 1831, Turner and six of his companions killed the Travis family as they slept. Turner led his group from house to house killing all the white people they encountered. Forty slaves joined Turner’s rebellion.⁷³

During the day on August 22, Turner moved on to the nearest town, Jerusalem. At this point word had spread to whites about the revolt and over a period of hours in a series of skirmishes with white militia and state and federal troops the rebels scattered or were captured or killed. Turner fled and went into hiding.⁷⁴

On October 30, 1831, Turner was captured near the Travis farm. On November 5, Turner was tried, and sentenced to execution. “He was hanged, and then skinned, on November 11.”⁷⁵

In total, the state [of Virginia] executed 55 people, banished many more, and acquitted a few. The state reimbursed the slave holders for their slaves. But in the hysterical climate that followed the rebellion, close to 200 black people were, many of whom had nothing to do with the rebellion, were murdered by white mobs. In addition, slaves as far away as North Carolina were accused of having a connection with the insurrection, and were subsequently tried and executed.⁷⁶

The slave revolt enacted black persons' struggle to create a new identity in America, to claim themselves as human beings with a new destiny ironically "drawing on America's own political and religious ideals":⁷⁷ Nat Turner, whose historical existence signified liberty, resistance, and the struggle for personhood to black people but symbolized for whites the beast and sexual outlaw.⁷⁸

Popular fiction of the day documents the evolving profile of the dangerous black man in white psyche. In Herman Melville's allegory of slave revolt *Benito Cereno*, the picture in the white imagination was the black man's actions of revolt in slavery, which make him into a beast.⁷⁹ "Accordingly, the slave in the moment of revolt was transmogrified by white cultural imagination from freedom fighter"⁸⁰ to "a revengeful, bloodthirsty, cunning, treacherous, savage."⁸¹ The actions of Nat Turner generalize to all black men. In the words of Maryland native at the time, John Dixon Log, whites saw, "a 'Nat Turner' in every Negro boy."⁸²

Nat Turner fueled an evil fiction in the minds of white people where by extension all black men were seen through the lens of black male bodies as a reptile,⁸³ a wolf,⁸⁴ a beast who took white men hostage, ravaged white women, and defiled the life of the plantation.⁸⁵ The conflation of Nat Turner with all Antebellum black males legitimized a system of disciplining of the black male body in the legal system that allowed slave masters to brand, stab, tar and feather, burn, torture, maim, mutilate, castrate, and kill their slaves.⁸⁶

Under the evil of chattel slavery white slaver owners knotted together the black male slave as beast into the law of the land. This seditious knot is stated with frightening clarity in a slave code from the South Carolina legislature:

Whereas, the plantations and estates of this Province cannot be well and sufficiently managed and brought into use, without the labor and service of negroes and other slaves; and forasmuch as the said Negroes and other slaves brought into this Province for that purpose, are of barbarous, wild, savage natures, and such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this Province; but that it is absolutely

necessary. That such other laws and orders, should be in this province be made and enacted, for the good regulating and ordering of them, as may restrain the disorders, rapines and inhumanity, to which they are naturally prone and inclined.⁸⁷

Slave law in the United States imagined black male slaves as only a moment away from reverting “to primitive beasts, held back only by the unchallengeable authority of the law.”⁸⁸ Within this logic of black male as beast in need of control, torture, maiming, crippling and killing were necessary “to prevent slaves from becoming Nat.”⁸⁹

After the Civil War white fictions about the immorality and danger of black men continued. Without the containment of slavery many whites believed that blacks were morally degenerating. In 1889 Philip Alexander Bruce published *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman*, a book summarizing commonplace ideas of the time.⁹⁰ Bruce argued that black emancipation had brought a rise in crime, sexual immorality, and this so-called black degeneracy, which “reflected most ominously in an increasing number of sexual assaults on white women.”⁹¹ Bruce claimed that the without the moral character building of slavery blacks were in moral decline and would be returning to what he called “a state of nature.”⁹²

At the turn of the century the language of blacks moral degeneracy shifted “in a new and spectacular way” to the image of black men as beasts, “‘a fiend, a wild beast, seeking whom he may devour.’”⁹³ What was so seditious about the reentrenchment of these bestial claims is that they were being religiously legitimized. For example, in 1900 Charles Carroll went so far as to claim that black men were a pre-Adamite creation by God and were responsible for tempting Eve. Carroll’s *The Negro a Beast* drew upon the racist ideology of Samuel Cartwright who argued that the black man was “literally an ape and not a human being.”⁹⁴

During Reconstruction lynching was considered by many whites to be a “necessary evil” to curb the “criminal impulses” of the black population.⁹⁵ Frederickson documents that as lynching became more brutal white rhetoric had to change its picture of black men in order to legitimize such barbarous action. Lynching had shifted from not only hanging black men with a noose, but also torturing and burning black men’s bodies.⁹⁶ In 1901 George T. Winston described what happened in white people’s minds before a lynching:

[W]hen a knock is heard at the door, [the Southern woman] shudders with nameless horror. The black brute is lurking in the dark, a monstrous beast,

crazed with lust. His ferocity is almost demoniacal. A mad bull or a tiger could scarcely be more brutal. A whole community is frenzied with horror, with the blind furious rage for vengeance.⁹⁷

Some people in our society may argue that these beliefs about black men are extreme, and would only be shared by today's white supremacists. However, popular culture seems to imply that these beliefs about black men continue to be deeply rooted in American collective consciousness. For example, there have been many references to President Barack Obama as a monkey.⁹⁸ Another example of this kind of reference is when *Vogue* magazine pictured NBA star LeBron James and Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen on its April 2008 cover. In this cover photo by Annie Leibovitz, "James strikes what some see as a gorilla-like pose, baring his teeth, with one hand dribbling a ball and the other around Bündchen's tiny waist."⁹⁹ The cover has been repeatedly compared to the 1933 film poster of *King Kong*. As Wesley Morris notes, "The picture's visual inspiration might be *King Kong*, but the narrative corollary is D. W. Griffin's *Birth of a Nation*. Men, lock up your ladies! Here comes LeBron!"¹⁰⁰ Similar critiques have been made about the portrayal of black men in the video game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.¹⁰¹ Young contends that it is in mass media and popular culture that the fears, aversions, and devaluations of "others" in our society are reinscribed. Young describes this form of reinscription as particularly seditious. Society can claim that it devalues no one because its formal rules and public policies demand civil rights for all persons.

If politicizing agents call attention to stereotypes and devaluations as evidence of deep and harmful oppression of groups stereotyped and degraded, they are often met with the response that they should not take these images seriously, because their viewers do not; these are only harmless fantasies, and everyone knows they have no relationship to reality. Once more reason is separated from the body and desire, and rational selves deny attachment to their bodies and desires.¹⁰²

Though these images are dismissed as simply "harmless fantasies" this picture of the black male body as beastly and dangerous continues to be recycled in American history and justifies white social and legal disciplines such as lynching and profiling. The murder on February 26, 2012, of Trayvon Martin reveals the deadly consequence of our collective inability to take responsibility for these pictures in our heads. A 17-year-old, Martin walked down the street carrying an ice tea and candy and was judged to be armed and dangerous—and was killed in

Sanford, Florida, by a vigilante trying to protect the neighborhood. What is profoundly troubling is that after Martin's death his character has been called into question as if to justify his death. Even his clothing seemed to imply guilt. "He must have been dangerous—he was wearing a black hoodie!" A less publicized but equally disturbing murder is that of Ramarley Graham. Eighteen-year old Graham was unarmed and shot by the New York City Police in the bathroom of his grandmother's home in the Bronx on February 2, 2012.

"Nat is very much with us."¹⁰³ This "picture in our heads" of the dangerous black male body is recycled in white cultural lore in violent images, idols, and icons of black men throughout our history; in persons such as Jack Johnson, The Scottsboro Boys, Emmet Till, The Central Park Rapists, Willie Bennett, Mike Tyson, Rodney King and Willie Horton, and the Jena 6.¹⁰⁴

WHITE CHRISTIAN AMNESIA AND ANAMNESIS

Perhaps more than any other people, Americans have been locked in a deadly struggle with time, with history. We've fled past and trained ourselves to suppress, if not forget troublesome details of national memory, and a great part of our optimism, like our progress, has been bought at the cost of ignoring the processes through which we've arrived at any given moment of our national existence (Ralph Ellison, "Blues People," in Shadow Act).¹⁰⁵

To confront hyper-incarceration means acknowledging and taking responsibility for the images we carry within as Americans. These "pictures in our heads" condition how we relate to each other in everyday life. The willingness to objectify an image, such as the "dangerous black man," is only the beginning of making sense of our complicity in our "carceral state." This step begins to make our whiteness visible. To honestly acknowledge the legion of images within us is to begin to understand how as white Americans we are deeply imbedded in a history we live out daily and of which we are only partially aware.

In his book *Engaging the Powers* Walter Wink writes that exposing the workings of our minds and hearts is a central ascetical task in relationship to understanding powers and principalities of this world.¹⁰⁶ Wink explains that the Christian's task is not to be immune to the workings of these powers but to "discern that internalized spirituality, name it and externalize it."¹⁰⁷ By objectifying and externalizing the pictures in our heads we discover the threads that connect us to history and to each other. These pictures are one way we carry the collective consciousness as Americans. Only by exposing these pictures to critical

reflection—and grace—can we understand how we are complicit in the everyday enactment of white privilege and racism.

Part of the privilege of being white in America is having the luxury of being able to only remember the things we want to remember. We live an ahistorical existence in relationship to the history that appears as marginal to “real” American history. The battle of Little Big Horn, Wounded Knee, The Middle Passage, and Nat Turner are the history of “other” Americans. For many white people it is illogical to make any connection between Nat Turner and interactions in everyday life. How could Nat Turner impact the experience of walking down a city street at night? White people voice a variety of objections when connections like this are made in conversations on race in America. For example, some whites claim that their families came to America after these events occurred, and therefore these events have nothing to do with them. However, every time *we* walk down the street and people are *not afraid* of us because of our white skin, we are enjoying the privileges of a history that we claim has no bearing upon us. As Nancy Pineda-Madrid explains, “We cannot view the world as an experience of the present nor merely as an experience external to ourselves; rather we must realize that it lives within us and in our communities.”¹⁰⁸

As Johann Baptist Metz warns, this strategy of selective memory harbors a great danger for Christian discipleship. According to Metz, when we erase the suffering of history we actually begin a process of erasing ourselves as subjects of history:

Having refused to recognize ourselves in the dark underside of history, we gradually lose a sense of our presence even in the grandeur and triumphs of history. We would no longer be the subjects who create ourselves in our society and history but rather the objects of social and historical processes which, although created by humans, are no longer humane but run according to standards of efficiency, standardization, and maximization of profit.¹⁰⁹

Metz’s warning to authentic memory demands a turning to history. The category of conversion is applicable here. Conversion at its root meaning is to turn—to turn toward God’s grace and to turn away from evil. For white American Christians our conversion means turning to our everyday experience and with God’s grace having the courage to explore how these experiences are imprinted by history, moreover, a deeply repressed and forgotten memory of slavery. To understand history in this way is not only to acknowledge that history of slavery is a fact but also to accept the truth about the memory of slavery’s corrupted images of beloved black human beings. These

images we have inherited enabled white human beings to believe that the institution of chattel slavery was not evil, but even normal (and virtuous). Turning toward this history is a way to understand how it is “normal” today for prisons to be overcrowded with the bodies of black men.

To remember is also a way to understand how white privilege imprisons us as white people. As Joseph Brant has described, white racial identity is an imprisoned cultural identity. By locking the people of color out, we also lock ourselves into this prison.¹¹⁰ As Alex Mikulich explained in Chapter 1, our amnesia is part of the four walls of our imprisonment. The four walls of our imprisonment are made of isolation, lies, amnesia, and addiction to white domination.¹¹¹ I would suggest that this prison of *whiteness* keeps us dismembered from our own ancestors. As many scholars have demonstrated, becoming white was “a reward given to those who successfully adapted to a highly regulated and socially repressive capitalist workplace.”¹¹² In order to gain the privileges of whiteness we had to trade in our ethnicity. Trading in our ethnicity for white privilege demanded a forgetting of the struggle of our ancestors. As Scot/Irish American I grew up unaware of the fact that my own ancestors were unjustly accused and imprisoned. One example of the criminalization of Irish men took place in 1875 at the Carbon County Jail in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. At this jail coal miners were held and hanged for murders they did not commit.¹¹³ Cartoons also portrayed the Irish as monkeys.¹¹⁴ The amnesia demanded of whiteness not only forgets the oppression inflicted upon my own ancestors but also keeps me from discovering their power to resist.

One example of the practice of memory is the MAAFA celebration in New Orleans’ Congo Square every summer. The word MAAFA is a Kiswahili word for “reoccurring disaster”. The purpose of this ritual is to remember all those who suffered and died through the African slave trade. Through prayer, music, dancing a re-remembering of the presence of slavery’s past enacts a communal practice of memory and healing. The Ashe Cultural Arts Center leads the MAAFA in Congo Square, the place where African slaves would gather on Sundays to find respite from slavery through song and dance. Congo Square locates African American struggle in New Orleans and is the birthplace of African American musical traditions. The ritual calls forth slave ancestors and invites all participants to remember all of our ancestors as a way of uniting in our shared humanity, and the struggle for love and life. The MAAFA celebration is a ritual that invites us to imagine and enact communal practices of memory and healing. Such communal

practices not only honor our ancestors, but also offers to our children new sources of power and possibility.*

For white Christians in the United States, this turning to our deep historical memories is a central task of our faith. As Metz has made clear, for Christians' memory, *anamnesis* is a central activity of our life and practice of belief.¹¹⁵ The central memory of our faith is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. According to Metz, the memory of Jesus' death is a "dangerous memory" because it holds an imperative to remember other human beings who suffer in history. Our practice of Eucharistic anamnesis is a practice that interrupts the seductive power of historical amnesia. To remember Jesus' death creates the possibility of white Christians remembering history, particularly history's underside. For Metz, to ignore this history is to forget the dangerous memory of Jesus' death, and live as if his resurrection did not matter to history. The amnesia of white privilege can keep us from authentically remembering Jesus, and therefore participating in the power of his resurrection.

Ironically, by trying to stay innocent of history in the past we actually are removing ourselves as agents who can change the course of history today. By erasing the suffering of human beings we are unconsciously saying that such events "just happened" through an anonymous course of events. By denying any agency in the history of suffering we begin to erase the exercise of agency in any historical event. No authentic change is possible because human action does not matter—we all become the victims of history.

NOTES

*I am grateful to Alex Mikulich for this explanation of the ritual of MAAFA.

1. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion* (New York: Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), p. 15.
2. I use the term "common sense" as described by Clifford Geertz. His notion is helpful here because he defines common sense as ideas that are uncritically received and unexamined—and taken for granted as true. See Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Third Edition, 1985).
3. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), p. 200.
4. James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt," in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 410.
5. Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), p. 42.

6. Ibid., p. 43.
7. Ibid.
8. Sociologists Leslie Houts Picca and Joe Feagin have studied the reactions of white people to noticing black men on the street at night. They note that when white women claim they would be scared of any man at night, they perceive black men to be more dangerous. See Leslie Houts Picca and Joe Feagin, *Two Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage and Frontstage* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 59–65.
9. In this essay I will use the words “we” and “our” for two reasons. First, what I am describing is a systemic issue that we enact as persons, but is not an individual phenomenon. These “pictures in our head” are an element of the complex collective cultural process of representation that reinscribes privilege. Second, I use collective pronouns “to situate the reader as active and responsible in the context of the argument I am advancing.” For this second point I am indebted to Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering + Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), fn. 1, p. 154.
10. Franz Fanon, “The Lived Experience of Being Black,” in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 70–75, 186.
11. Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 5.
12. Ibid., p. 21. Townes explains that this imagination is in all people living in our society.
13. Ibid., p. 21.
14. Ibid., p. 21.
15. Ibid., p. 5
16. I am grateful to George Yancy for his writing that helped me understand this passage. Yancy elaborates on this “larger unthematized sociovisual epistemology” and posits its origin on the auction blocks of chattel slavery. See George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield), pp. 148–149.
17. Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, p. 22.
18. Ibid., p. 22.
19. I want to thank Margie Pfeil for this insight; see her article, “The Transformative Power of the Periphery: Can a White US Catholic Opt for the Poor?,” in *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), p. 113.
20. Ibid.
21. Shawn Copeland, “Foundations for Catholic Theology in an African American Context,” in *Black and Catholic*, p. 112. Copeland makes this same point in “The Exercise of Black Catholic Theology in the United States,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 3, no. 3 (1996): 11. See also Susan Griffin, “Pornography and Silence,” *Made From*

- This Earth: An Anthology of Writings by Susan Griffin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 110–160; Clarence Rufus J. Rivers, “The Oral African American Tradition Versus the Ocular Western Tradition. The Spirit of Worship,” *Taking Down Our Harps, Black Catholics in the United States*, ed. Diana Hayes and Cyprian Davis (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), p. 239.
22. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 148.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid., pp. 148–151.
 25. Otto Klineberg, “Pictures in Our Heads,” *Readings in Sociology*, ed. Edgar Schuler, Thomas Fords Hoult, Duane Gibson, and Wilbur Brookover (New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1974), p. 632. See Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922).
 26. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 88–89. This quote is taken from Jannette Dates and Thomas Mascaro, “African Americans in Film and Television: Twentieth Century Lessons for a New Millennium,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 2.
 27. Jannette Dates and Thomas Mascaro, “African Americans in Film and Television,” p. 2.
 28. For more on this idea of the unconscious, but very active images that condition perception and judgment, see Shankar Vedantam, *The Hidden Brain: How Our Unconscious Minds Elect Presidents, Control Markets, Wage Wars and Save Our Lives* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010).
 29. “How the Hidden Brain does the Thinking for Us,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition Transcript* (January 25, 2010) <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122864641> (accessed May 27, 2012).
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 122.
 34. Young writes that explicit and “discursively focused racism and sexism have lost considerable legitimacy.” And because of this shift “we must identify a different social manifestation of these forms of group oppression corresponding to specific contemporary circumstances, new forms which have continuities and discontinuities with past structures.” (Ibid., p. 131) I think that Young’s observations about the loss of the legitimacy of discursively focused racism and sexism was accurate in 1990. Today, in 2012 I think the issue of discursively focused racism, sexism, classicism, homophobia is more complex. There is a resurgence of discursive practices that reinscribe oppression—and are widely accepted. And I will illustrate that her

observation continues to be an important description of our situation. And as Young points out these processes are constantly shifting, and therefore need constant interrogation.

35. Ibid., p. 132.
36. Ibid.
37. This particular passage in Fanon's writing is multivalent. In the limited space in this chapter I cannot do justice to the reflection the passage deserves. It is important to point out that the child not only sees Fanon as dangerous, but as an animal. For more on this disturbing point, see George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, pp. 73–75.
38. I have often wondered about the mother in Fanon's experience. To see a person this cold wouldn't it be appropriate to offer a scarf or something to keep warm. The aversion and avoidance Young describe is a blunting of basic human ability to respond to suffering. Shawn Copeland insightfully describes how racism blunts basic human ability to respond to suffering. See Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), pp. 95–101.
39. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 132.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p. 135.
42. Ibid., p. 150.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 151.
46. Ibid.
47. Barbara Applebaum, *Being Good, Being White: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 119.
48. Edward I. Koch, "Blacks, Jews, Liberals and Crime: Is the Black-Crime Problem a Crime Problem, or Is It a Poverty Problem, or an Education Problem?," *National Review* (May 16, 1994): 34.
49. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion* (New York: Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), p. 3.
50. Ibid., p. 8.
51. Ibid., p. 8.
52. I appreciate Mary Hobgood's definition of "hegemonic knowledge." Her clear concise work is helpful to theoretically connect Lippmann and Gramsci at this point. "Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci defined 'hegemonic knowledge' as knowledge developed by dominant groups in the society to further their own monopolization of power." *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), p. 11. Hobgood explains that this knowledge is usually only available to people because it not only

- legitimizes but supports the status quo. This knowledge is communicated in the major institutions within society—schools, churches, families, the government, the media, and the legal and medical professions. She explains, “Dominant groups with power in these institutions create discourses, including myths, symbols, language patterns and knowledge through which we understand ourselves as ‘properly’—that is, hierarchically—classed, raced, and gendered person. They also shape cultural practice, such as the work ethic and sexual behavior, further regulating fundamental aspects of our lives” (ibid., p. 11). See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1972).
53. Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, re. and exp., ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), pp. 193–194.
 54. Ibid.
 55. Ibid., p. 7.
 56. Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, p. 4.
 57. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion* (New York: Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), p. 15.
 58. See Eugene Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1969, 1988).
 59. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 259.
 60. Ibid., p. 142.
 61. For more on the history of these two stereotypes, see John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: 1974); Leslie Owens, *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press 1976).
 62. Ronald Takaki, “The Black Child-Savage in Antebellum America,” in *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America*, ed. G. B. Nash and R. Weiss (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 39.
 63. George Fredrickson, “White Images of Black Slaves (Is What We See in Others Some Reflection of What We Find in Ourselves?),” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1997), p. 39.
 64. Ibid. 41.
 65. See Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia Relative to the Murder Logan Family*, ed. William Peden (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), pp. 162–163; Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary*

- from *Dixie* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), pp. 147–149; Fredrika Brewer, *The Homes of the New World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), p. 190.
66. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 16.
 67. To understand Nat Turner's actions they must be historically contextualized in light of the French Revolution but particularly Haiti's overthrow of slavery at the hands of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and the slave insurrections in the United States led by Denmark Vessy and Gabriel Prosser. See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1963), p. ix; Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).
 68. See further Thomas Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the leader of the late insurrection, in Southampton* (Baltimore: Lucas and Deaver, 1831). This book was dictated to a white lawyer, Thomas Gray, days before Nat Turner's execution.
 69. "Nat Turner's Rebellion," *Africans in America* at www.pbs.org/wbh/aia/part3/3p1518.html (accessed November 24, 2008).
 70. Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (1993), p. 269.
 71. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 153, footnote 20.
 72. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
 73. "Nat Turner's Rebellion," *Africans in America* at www.pbs.org/wbh/aia/part3/3p1518.html (accessed November 24, 2008).
 74. *Ibid.*
 75. *Ibid.*
 76. *Ibid.*
 77. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 17.
 78. Even the "historical" accounts of Nat Turner amplify theft of agency by white culture of black men. The limited space here does not allow for full account of the research that critiques the controversial creation of William Styron's work, *Confessions of Nat Turner*. See *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Albert Stone, *The Return of Nat Turner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992).
 79. Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (1855). In *Shorter Novels of Herman Melville*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Merston m. Seatts, Jr. (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 79.
 80. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 18.
 81. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972), p. 225.
 82. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
 83. "The slave snakishly writhed up from the boat's bottom, his countenance lividly vindictive, expressing the centered purpose of his soul." Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, p. 79.

84. "[F]ighting to prevent recapture . . . with their red tongues lolling wolf-like from their mouths." Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, p. 79. Quoted in D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 18.
85. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972), p. 225.
86. See Judith Shafer, "'Details of a Most Revolting Character': Cruelty to Slaves as Seen in Appeals to the Supreme Court of Louisiana," *Chi. Kent Law Review* 68 (1993): 1283.
87. *Slave Code of South Carolina*, p. 16. Quoted in D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 21.
88. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 22.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
90. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 260.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
92. Philip A. Bruce, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), p. 246.
93. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, p. 276.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
95. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, p. 272.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
98. Doing an online search you will find over 600,000 posting addressing these images. The most recent example of this in mainstream media is a cartoon by Sean Delanos in June 22, 2012, *New York Post*. Delanos's cartoon pictures two police men, one of whom is holding a smoking gun. In addition, a dead monkey lies dead with bullet holes. The caption reads "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill." See www.nypost.com/opinion/cartoons/delanos.htm/delanos.htm. In addition there is a website dedicated to photoshopped images of Obama called, "Primate in Chief: A guide to Racist Obama Monkey Photoshops." See www.theawl.com/2011/primate-in-chief-a-gudie-to-racist-obama-monkey-pictures.
99. LeBron James 'Vogue' cover called racially insensitive," *USA Today* (March 24, 2008) at www.usatoday.com/life/people/2008-03-24-vogue-controversy_N.htm (accessed June 24, 2012).
100. Wesley Morris, "Monkey Business: So Is That Vogue Cover Racist or Not?," *Slate* (March 31, 2008) at www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2008/03/monkey_business.html (accessed June 23, 2012).
101. Anna Everett and S. Craig Watkins, "The Power of Play and Performance of Race in Video Games," *The Ecology of Games Connecting Youth, Games and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge: MIT Press,

- 2008), pp. 141–166. The issue of video games reinscribing the myth of the dangerous black man deserves much more consideration than can be explored here. A conversation between two students highlights the importance of this work. As we discussed in *Grand Theft Auto* one white male student who played the game with his father said, “The game gives me a sensitivity to people who live that life.” A Latina female student replied, “But it is a game, and all the black men look like animals.”
102. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 136.
 103. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 29.
 104. See Ronald Hall, “Clowns, Buffoons, and Gladiators: Media Portrayals of African American Men,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 1, no.3 (1993): 239–251; Jannette Dates and William Barlow eds. *Split Image: African American’s in the Mass Media* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, Second Edition, 1993); Linda Tucker, *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2007).
 105. Quoted in D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 15.
 106. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 88.
 107. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 108. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering + Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 126.
 109. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
 110. Joseph Brandt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 215.
 111. For more on this idea of the four walls of white imprisonment, see Joseph Brandt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, pp. 129–141.
 112. Mary Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), p. 40. See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).
 113. For more on this, see www.theoldjailmuseum.com
 114. One such cartoon is called “Outrageous” and published in *Life* (May 11, 1893) and can be found at xroads.virginia.edu/~ma04/wood/ykid/imagehtml/monkey_irish.htm
 115. See James Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

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CHAPTER 4



HIP HOP AND THE SEDITIOUS REINVENTION OF THE DANGEROUS BLACK MAN

Laurie Cassidy

In the past Nat was portrayed as a hatchet- or sword-wielding slave, his red tongue lolling in lust for rape or violence. Nat is now portrayed in our social narrative in modern dress with a boom box and twisty braids, or wearing a rumpled jogging suit, the usual suspect in the war on drugs.¹

The present performance of black male bodies in hip-hop has a frightening parallel to the image of Nat Turner in the history of white American imagination. Like the symbol of Nat Turner, the voices, words, and messages of hip-hop have come to mean something very different than were originally intended. In this chapter I will interrogate how contemporary mainstream hip-hop enacts the racist image of black men as dangerous and criminal. I will demonstrate how the representation of black male bodies in hip-hop functions to preserve “the social order and the prison writ large in the United States.”²

I use the term hip-hop here as an umbrella term that includes the practices of rap music, dance, fashion, and graffiti art.³ Within this chapter my focus will be on the vision, lyrics, and performance of rap music in America. Hip-hop is a highly contested cultural site for many reasons, which deserves sustained attention by Catholic social ethics. Shawn Copeland has demonstrated that the portrayal of women by some artists replicates the images of women during

slavery.⁴ Copeland's insights offer an imperative for Catholic theologians to critically explore this global phenomenon. My purpose in this chapter is neither to defend nor to denigrate the music of hip-hop, but rather to deconstruct how it functions in reinscribing the myth of the dangerous black man in white imagination. I will argue that rap originated as a powerful counterhegemonic practice in which black men's voices enacted agency by proclaiming a prophetic message about life in the United States.⁵ However, this practice has been subverted by the commercialization and commodification by mainstream culture. This commercialization of hip-hop is a reinvention of the dangerous black man, whose bodies are despised and desired within white imagination. Moreover, white people listen to mainstream hip-hop.

First, I will document the prophetic vision and performance of early hip-hop that originated from the dance parties organized by Cool Herc at the 800 block of Segwick Avenue in the Bronx. Drawing upon Tricia Rose and Michael Eric Dyson I will argue that in its origins hip-hop is a profound form of musical, cultural, and social creativity that enables black youth "to reclaim their history, reactivate forms of black radicalism, and contest the powers of despair and economic depression."⁶ This creative form of cultural expression also offered America a wide spectrum of black voices, some of whom prophetically challenged the economic, political, and social status quo.

Second, I will explore contemporary mainstream rap as reinscribing the myth of the dangerous black male within white imagination and normalizing the ideology of, in the words of bell hooks, "capitalism, the support of patriarchal violence, the conservative approach to gender roles, the call to liberal individualism—all reflect the ruling values of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, albeit in black face."⁷

To conclude the second section of our text I will draw upon Alex Mikulich's work to illustrate that for white listeners mainstream hip-hop is a way of culturally reinforcing our white habitus. Mainstream hip-hop continues to problematize black men as criminal and make the operations of whiteness invisible.

THE PROPHETIC VOICE OF HIP-HOP

"We're trying to start a mind revolution... 'by any means necessary' "

Public Enemy⁸

Hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose makes a profound observation about the origins of hip-hop. She describes early hip-hop as a vast community,

having all the ingredients of the dominant culture, hustlers, and heroes. Though it was not an ideal community, Rose explains, “[H]ip hop was a locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community.”⁹ Rose sees these original energies as what made hip-hop “a force for creativity and love, affirmation and resistance.”¹⁰

Rose’s commentary is very important for the work of this volume because what she is describing is a space in American culture where black people were agents, using their voices for empowerment and self-definition. Not only did this music interrupt the myth of the dangerous black man, it held a mirror up for white America to see this myth as a lie. One powerful way it contested this lie was in the diversity of male voices in hip-hop. Afrika Bambaataa invited all people into the Zulu Nation of Planet Rock. KRS-One critiqued consumerism and the violence of poverty in rhymes like, “Love’s Gonna Getcha.” Heavy D rhymed about romance and love and advocated not cursing. Chubb Rock called himself a “modest fellow” while telling his listeners they were too young to be in a casket. He exhorted everyone to turn away from all temptation of guns and drugs and have fun. The ever funky Digital Underground’s Humpty proclaims “Doowuchyalike”¹¹ These rappers are only a few examples of the unique voices of black men in hip-hop. As Rose describes, [H]ip hop served as a rich alternative space for multicultural, male and female, culturally relevant, anti-racist community building.”¹²

Jeff Ogbar offers a historical perspective on culture that contextualizes Rose’s description. Ogbar explains that the founding generation of hip-hop grew up in the 1970s when images of black people were in flux. Television programs like *Hogan’s Heroes*, *Sanford and Sons*, and the *Jeffersons* offered some range of black characters.¹³ Even in light of movies like *Shaft* and *Superfly*, Mark Anthony Neal contends these problematic portrayals of black men “did usher in a cultural moment in which black male identity was presented in broader ways.”¹⁴

In this first section I will give an overview of the origin of hip-hop, its practice and vision. I will demonstrate how this unique American cultural expression not only interrupted the myth of the dangerous black man, but it also enacted a community of agents with a prophetic message about America.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the music and message of hip-hop was a prophetic voice crying out in the wilderness naming the contrast experience of urban blight, poverty, crime, and hopelessness as the state of affairs for poor black people in America. Dyson explains that pinpointing the exact origin of rap music in hip-hop is difficult.

Rap can be traced back to the revolutionary verse of Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets, to Pigmeat Markham's "Here Come de Judge," and even to Bessie Smith's rapping to a beat in some of her blues. We can also cite ancient African oral traditions as the antecedents to various cultural practices.¹⁵

The heart of this genre's creative development was in the inner-city neighborhoods of New York City. In the tradition of Last Poets, old school hip artists, such as Grand Master Flash, The Poor Righteous Teachers, Afrikaa Bambaataa, and Public Enemy, reflected the situated knowledge of black people in America.¹⁶ As Cornel West explains, "Their truth telling about black suffering and resistance in America was powerful."¹⁷

This prophetic vision was deeply rooted in a variety of cultural practices. Many scholars describe hip-hop as having five fundamental elements; rapping or emceeing, DJing, breaking dancing (b-boying/b-girling), graffiti writing, and beat-boxing.¹⁸ These activities reveal hip-hop's origins as a fully embodied cultural expression. In other words, hip-hop was/is not only about a person creating rhymes, but hip-hop culture involves a variety of activities like dancing, dressing, and graffiti. This whole body involvement is seen clearly in b-boxing or beat-boxing, in which music is created with one's body. B-boxing or beat-boxing is "creating rhythmic sounds with various parts of the body, particularly the throat, mouth and hands."¹⁹

One of the original voices of hip-hop, KRS-One (Lawrence "Kris" Parker) posits these activities in a more inclusive vision of hip-hop culture. According to KRS-One hip-hop is a worldview. He defines hip-hop as

the name of our collective consciousness and inner-city strategy toward self-improvement. In its spiritual essence, Hip hop cannot be (and should not be) interpreted or described in words. It is a feeling. An awareness. A state of mind. Intellectually, it is an alternative behavior that enables one to transform subjects and objects in an attempt to describe and/or change the character and desires of one's inner being.²⁰

Dyson explains that the strategies for self-improvement in hip-hop culture included perfecting the craft of orality and also involved retrieving black history. He explains that rap artists' grammatical creativity, verbal dexterity, and linguistic innovation are part of the African American community's preoccupation with literacy "since the inception of legally coerced illiteracy during slavery."²¹ Dyson notes West's observation that rap artists are bridging two key traditions in black cultures: preaching and music. Dyson explains,

The rap artist appeals to the rhetorical practices eloquently honed in African-American religious experiences and the cultural potency of black singing/musical traditions to produce an engaging hybrid. They are truly urban [g]riots dispensing social and cultural critique, verbal shamans exorcising the demons of cultural amnesia.²²

Interrupting this cultural amnesia was a key activity of many rap artists like KRS-One and Public Enemy. Dyson explains that rap “retrieved black ideas, movements, and figures in combating the racial amnesia that threatens to relegate the achievements of the black past to the ash heap of dismemory.”²³ “Proud to Black” is one example of this retrieval by Run-DMC, where they rap about people in Black history, for example Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X. In a track called “What is That?,” KRS-One asks why young black people are not taught black history. He does an incredible rhyme about the book of Genesis, in which he points out Abraham had to have been a black man.

In addition to interrupting cultural amnesia, in the 1980s rap artists spoke out against economic injustice. As Rose explains, “Life on the margins of postindustrial urban American is inscribed in hip hop style, sound, lyrics and thematics.”²⁴ This is illustrated clearly in the rhymes of Grand Master Flash. In 1982 Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five proclaimed “The Message” a classic rap that rhymed a prophetic word that though some people in America were thriving because of Reaganomics, black people living in the inner city were not.²⁵ Grand Master Flash did not romanticize gang life or crime; rather, their lyrics painted a vivid picture of the concrete human existence for black people living in New York City housing projects, struggling to find adequate employment with a high school education, and the temptation to sell drugs in neighborhoods filled with trash, broken glass, and abandoned buildings. In the infamous and oft-repeated chorus, Grand Master Flash cries out: “It’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder/How I keep from going under.”²⁶ The “Message” not only interrupted the myth of “trickle-down” economics but also attempted to hold up a mirror for white America to see ourselves.

Old School’s social critique also included questioning police harassment and brutality, particularly of young black men. As Rose observes, “For many poor and working-class African Americans, police and brutality are synonymous.”²⁷ In raps such as KRS-One’s “Who Protects us from You?,” L. L. Cool J’s “Illegal Search,” and Public Enemy’s “Night of the Living Baseheads” artists questioned the disconnect between law and morality, and asked listeners to reflect on the “the

distinction between legal codes and moral codes between law and truth.”²⁸ On behalf of the poor black community KRS-One voiced cynicism, fear, and suspicion of the police when he rapped²⁹ “So do not kick my door down and tie me up/Cause you were put here to protect us/But who protects us from you?”³⁰

This suspicion of the police is represented visually in the logo of Public Enemy. Their logo is the silhouette of a black man as a target seen through a rifle’s sights. The target acts as a way of externalizing the belief of many young black men that they are targets for police brutality, drug access, and frustrated educational and economic opportunity.³¹ Rose explains the multivalent nature of this logo, which appears on Public Enemy’s albums, in their videos and on their merchandising.

It is a visualization of police profiling and surveillance against young black working-class males. This target covers the back of many PE tee-shirts, turning young fans explicitly into moving targets, externalizing the process of sighting and targeting that circumscribes black social space. Targeting also effectively silences the group under surveillance. Yet, in the context of PE’s music and imagery, which is unapologetically pro-black, the target represents focus and commitment to black males. Public Enemy targets black males too, addressing them directly, placing them in focus and bringing their issues and concerns to the foreground.³²

Hip-hop’s critique of the police became even more explicit and strident in the lyrics of “Gangsta” rap, which originated on the West Coast in the gang culture of South Central Los Angeles, Compton, Long Beach, and East Oakland, California.³³ Musicians like Tupac, Biggie Smalls, Snoop Dogg, and the Getto Boys have given the hip-hop genre its criminal image. This subgenre in hip-hop is epitomized in the group of emcees called NWA consisting of Dr. Dre, Ezy-E, Ice Cube, MC Ren, and Ice-T.

In 1988 NWA released its controversial hit, “Fuck Tha Police” on the album *Straight Outta Compton*. This explicit and highly controversial rap voiced rage against the police, “cause I’m brown/And not the other color/so police think/They have the authority to kill a minority.”³⁴ The lyrics of this rap addressed the police directly and are what NWA’s MC Ice Cube has called “revenge fantasies.”³⁵ The song protested racial profiling and “culminates with the simulated imprisonment of an offending officer.”³⁶ NWA defended this song explaining that they were “underground street reporters” who were giving voice to a reality few white people experienced.

By any account, the conditions of NWA's hometown of Compton, beset by the influx of crack cocaine and the exodus of job prospects, bore little resemblance to what most American families would recognize as reality. By 1989, the state of California was home to an estimated eighty thousand gang members; police officers were comparing the landscape of South Central to that of the Vietnam conflict; and the US Army was sending doctors to hospitals in Watts so they could train surgeons in a war-zone like setting. NWA purported to speak the truths that most Americans could scarcely imagine.³⁷

NWA's rap drew unprecedented attention from the FBI. In an official FBI letter from the assistant director Mitch Ahlerich, the agency claimed that such music advocated violence against the police, which justified targeting NWA.³⁸ During the summer of 1989 there was an informal fax network fueled by Ahlerich's letter, which urged police to help cancel NWA's concerts.³⁹ At one NWA concert in Detroit that summer, police rushed the stage. After NWA went to their hotel, they found police there who detained the group for 15 minutes.⁴⁰

This incident of the FBI's concern and involvement in NWA's music is profoundly disturbing for many reasons. From the point of view of cultural hegemony, the discourse of gangster rap might actually be much more dangerous to the status quo than actual illegal behavior of black men. The language of NWA holds up for examination how power is exercised and how institutions are legitimized within dominant white culture. Put more precisely, gangster rap lyrics about police brutality destabilized "hegemonic discourses and attempt[ed] to legitimate counter hegemonic interpretations"⁴¹ of how society functions and what is law and lawlessness.

The language of gangster rap is the language of "outlaw culture," which is a consistent form of self-expression within the African American community.

"Outlaw" means outside the purview of mainstream law, that is, outside of the law's regard and protection. The state of being on the out-side is both a matter of fact—imposed by dominant legal discourse that silences, marginalizes and constructs black life as dangerous and deviant—and a matter of choice, in the sense that black communities often place themselves in deliberate opposition to mainstream cultural and legal norms when those norms ill serve such communities. "Outlaw culture" refers to a network of shared institutions, values and practices through which subordinate groups, elaborate an autonomous, oppositional consciousness.⁴²

West explains that this language is part of the marginalist tradition of response to the conditions of African American life. This tradition finds no solace in assimilating into the dominant culture of

the American mainstream. In West's words, "It expresses a critical disposition toward Afro-American culture and American Society."⁴³

According to scholar Imani Perry, hip-hop's language of the outlaw functions in two very subversive ways. First, it is a language that reframes legal narratives of crime and punishment. Second, it is form of mimicry that not only offers social critique but also is a disruption of white supremacist authority.⁴⁴

Utilizing the reasoning of legal scholarship Perry points out that the language of the courtroom is exclusive, and often "prohibits free and nuance verbal exchange."⁴⁵ The narrative of gangster rap in hip-hop expands the legal language to provide a radically sociocultural horizon to moral actions, which challenges an individualistic understanding of black crime and imprisonment. Hip-hop artists "often tell the story of their illegal activity as resulting from limited options, and they depict the slide into criminality."⁴⁶ Perry explains, "Black male rappers personify or witness-personify, the narrative of the black male engaged in criminal activity who increasingly populates American prisons, and that narrative is one of social marginalization and its concomitant psychological and emotional issues."⁴⁷

In addition, Perry argues that the outlaw language of gangster rap also plays the function of "trickster subversion," in that it provides an alternative legal narrative; moreover, it is also a form of mimicry. Gangster mimicry exploits "the fear of the black assailant as a source of power."⁴⁸

This mimicry disrupts the concept of superiority within the dominant system. This mimicry in hip-hop acts out the myth of the dangerous black man, by making the myth present in the music. The music mimics the very stereotypes of this myth in white society to dislocate "the authority for defining black underworld and manipulating the negative images of black America in order to serve the interests of white America."⁴⁹

This mimicry gives voice to the gangster as a way to critique it and is an indictment of the commonsense notion of criminality of black men within white ideology.

The artist might mirror the stereotype of the black assailant or criminal effectively and subvert not in terms of critiquing the stereotype itself, but in terms of giving voice to the stereotypical figure. The embodiment becomes an indictment of white supremacy when listeners hear, in the context of the narrative, a critique of the sociological conditions—poverty, police brutality, joblessness, that contribute to his or her becoming this person. Here thugs themselves, rather than mainstream analysts, have the authority to

explain their actions, and they generally do not attribute them to deficient culture or racial flaws, but to hunger and lousy schools and tragic formative experiences.⁵⁰

The vision and evolution of hip-hop as I have described is not without contradiction and controversy—within hip-hop and also within the dominant culture. The contradictions, particularly in misogynist images and language in rap, demands sustained analysis. The male dominance of hip-hop and ways that images and lyrics of rap express homophobia, and enact sexism is profoundly disturbing. Eric Dyson has drawn a number of connections between the injustices done to women in slavery and some rap artists' music videos and lyrics.⁵¹ Kendall Thomas also draws attention to how rap and hip-hop culture define "authentic" masculinity in homophobic terms.⁵² Byron Hurt makes profoundly disturbing connections between the misogyny and homophobia in hip-hop culture.⁵³

My point here is not to defend rap music or to ignore these issues but to inquire into how this cultural phenomenon has been understood by white people. What is disturbing is that white critique of hip-hop often does not hear or take seriously the politically conscious message of rap artists. Black voices of authentic critique, particularly those of young black men, are not heard but are criminalized and seen as a danger to American culture. In addition, some hip-hop artists come to represent all black people. The white hip-hop artists like Vanilla Ice, Eminem, or even the Beastie Boys have never been generalized into representing all white people. Also, the dominant culture fails to see rap as reflecting our collective social ills. We fail to recognize the homophobia and virulent misogyny in the dominant culture.⁵⁴ A number of cultural critics have described this form of critique as "moral panics." The dynamic of "moral panics" is a cultural tactic of hegemony. To mobilize alarm about the danger of hip-hop to American morality is how the status quo can be maintained.⁵⁵ In relationship to hyper-incarceration, such critiques obfuscate how white people benefit from the current prison system, both socially and economically. Such moral panics do not change anything about society but only serve to reinforce hegemony.

What is important to note is the image of black people implicit in some of the critiques by white people. Robert Bork, former Supreme Court nominee, was an outspoken critic of rap, and he claimed it was pushing America toward "Gomorrhah." Bork claimed that rap was crude noise "little more than a knuckle-dragging sub-pidgin of grunts and snarls, capable of expressing only the more pointless forms of

violence and the more brutal forms of sex.”⁵⁶ John H. McWhorter has written that hip-hop is “reinforcing the stereotypes that long hindered blacks . . . rap retards black success.”⁵⁷ Bork’s use of words like grunts and snarls are reminiscent of seeing black people as animals. Bork attributes a great deal of power to black people, particularly those he seems to describe in very animalistic terms. McWhorter claims that hip-hop retards black success. I find this claim very problematic. Does the stereotype impact white people’s understanding of black people or black people’s self-understanding? How does music function to impede success?

hooks claims that many of the critiques against hip-hop follow a predictable pattern, “A central motivation for highlighting gangsta rap continues to be the sensationalist drama of demonizing black youth culture in general and the contributions of young black men in particular.”⁵⁸ In addition, the generalization of all of rap as “gansta” ignores the diverse voices of this complex genre and reduces it to the dominant stereotype of the dangerous black man. Katheryn Russell-Brown raises a number of critical issues to bear in understanding Bork and McWhorter’s critiques. She notes that there is very little empirical research that substantiates many claims to the negative long-term effects of hip-hop. Russell-Brown contends that this lack of empirical support for these judgments “suggests that something more was afoot.”⁵⁹ Amy Binder makes observations that resonate with the historical study in the last chapter. She notes that though other forms of contemporary have been critiqued the forms of critique against hip-hop resonate with historically white fears of black people. For example, she points out it was not only the music but also hip-hop listeners who were dangerous. Hip-hop listeners were deemed to be “legions of misogynistic listeners who pose a danger to women.”⁶⁰ Rose summarizes these concerns in a pointed way related to reinscribing the myth of the dangerous black man:

The more public opinion, political leaders, and policymakers criminalized hip hop as the cultural example of a criminal way of thinking, the more imaginary black monsters will surface. In this fearful fantasy, hip hop style . . . becomes a code for criminal behavior, and censuring the music begins to look more like fighting crime.⁶¹

HIP-HOP AND THE REINVENTION OF NAT TURNER

All my life I have been into hip hop, and it should mean more than just somebody standing on the corner selling dope . . . I ain’t never

shot nobody, I ain't never stabbed no body, I am forty-five years old and I ain't got no criminal record, you know what I mean? The only thing I ever did was be about my music. So I mean . . . we should be teaching people what it is about life in the ghetto, me trying to grow up and to come out of the ghetto. And we need everybody's help out there to make that happen.

Melle Mel, leader of Grand Master Flash, 2007 Induction
Speech at Rock and Roll Hall of Fame⁶²

Melle Mel's poignant comments are a call for collective response to the social issues that are portrayed in rap lyrics. Old school hip-hop struggled to create the possibility of such change. What is powerful about rap music is that it can connect bodies, political change, and deep human desire—all in the context of community. Drawing upon Claude Levi-Strauss, Mark Lewis Taylor explains that rap music “conjures spirit.”⁶³ Taylor explains that music gives pleasure, and in having social and political impact it “awakes certain spiritual functions.”⁶⁴ With Levi-Strauss, Taylor points out that music works upon listeners. Through the physicality of musical beats and organic rhythms and the sound of music coupled with the cultural message, the listener is being engaged both in mind and in body, and in emotion.⁶⁵

When rappers tell alternative stories while facing police brutality or prison warehousing of the racially stigmatized poor, depicting the struggle, survival and flourishing of oppressed communities, they conjure spiritual practices for these communities. When they challenge power inequalities and material oppression, deploying polyvocal discourse . . . that destabilizes dominant discourses and patterns, then rap musicians constitute a spiritual practice.⁶⁶

As West observes, this subversive force of the urban griots of hip-hop has been cannibalized and commodified by the entertainment industry.⁶⁷ The process of commodification redefined mainstream hip-hop from the voice of the prophetic to a picture of street prowess “with racist stereotypes of black men as hypercriminal and hypersexual and black women as willing objects of their conquests.”⁶⁸ West distinguishes between the market-driven hip-hop as Constantinian and the politically conscious form of hip-hop he labels as prophetic. He explains his distinction in this way,

Like the forms of black music in the past, hip-hop seized the imaginations of young people across the globe. Prophetic hip-hop has told painful truths about their internal struggles and how the decrepit schools, inadequate health care, unemployment and drug markets of the Urban centers of the American

empire have wounded their soul. Yet Constantinian hip-hop revels in the fetishism of commodities, celebrates the materialism, hedonism, and narcissism of culture (the bling! bling!) and promotes a degrading of women, gays, lesbians, and gangster enemies. In short, hip-hop is a full-scale mirror of the best and worst, the virtuous and the vicious aspects of our society.⁶⁹

For Catholic social ethics there is an enormous amount to take up in West's description of the history, politics, and economics of this shift in hip-hop. My purpose is to demonstrate how this shift from the prophetic to Constantinian involved a shift from the voice and message of black men (and women!) to a focus on a marketed image of the black man as dangerous and criminal—controlled by white people.⁷⁰ This shift from message to representation made mainstream hip-hop music more commercially lucrative. Moreover, mainstream hip-hop's commercial success was made possible by purchase of the music by white fans. To accurately account for this complex shift in hip-hop from a voice of the marginalized to a mainstream commodity requires in-depth interrogation for it involves (among others) political factors such as Clinton's 1996 passage of the Telecommunications Act, and media shifts such as MTV allowing the airing of black rap videos. As S. Craig Watkins explains, this complex shift resulted in mainstream hip-hop "dancing to the beat of a different drummer—the rhythmic patterns of the mainstream market place."⁷¹ Political activist Chuck D of Public Enemy observes,

"[I]n the first ten to twelve years of rap recordings," . . . "Rappers rapped for the people, and they rapped against the elite establishment. In the last [ten] or so years, rappers rap for the companies and their contracts, and they're part of the establishment now. It's two diametrically opposed ideas."⁷²

I will explore how the shift in hip-hop from being a message to an image reinscribes the myth of the dangerous black man in white imagination. For white people the moral pathology of this cultural production of evil in mainstream rap is that this performance reifies the image of black men as criminal and continues to make whiteness invisible.

In music of artists such as 50 cent, the Game, Ludicris, and Lil'Wayne there is a romanticizing of criminal behavior, a glorification of gang life, and an almost initiation-like quality to the experience of prison to authentic black manhood. Rather than a language of protest, this commercialized gangster rap has developed new norms for black men's destiny and reifies the white fantasy of black male criminals. In the words of hooks,

Much hip-hop culture is mainstream because it is just a black minstrel show—an imitation of dominator desire, not a rearticulation, not a radical alternative. No wonder then that patriarchal hip hop culture has done little to save the lives of black males and done more to teach them, as Gwendolyn Brook's prophetic Poem, which used the popular vernacular phrase "we real cool" as its title, states to embrace a vision of "we real cool" that includes the assumption that "we die soon."⁷³

Rose makes a key point in relationship to commercialization of hip-hop. In her book, *The Hip Hop Wars* she notes that in the middle to late 1990s once hip-hop became focused on "gangsta" and "pimp" the record companies became much more involved in what was recorded, sold, and played. "This dramatically increased their influence on what music was available and whose music played endlessly on powerful outlets such as 'urban contemporary' radio stations, BET, and MTV."⁷⁴ Rose points out that mainstream rap is a mediated picture of black youth, particularly of black men. However, mainstream rap is marketed *as if* it is an unmediated product of black men's lived experience. This corporately mediated portrait is sold as "authentic" black life, which is consumed by a majority white audience.⁷⁵ A white female student recently commented in my class, "I don't like rap, but it does give you a picture of how they live, I feel really bad for them." In regard to this kind of perspective Rose writes,

Although it's well known that mainstream commercial hip hop's obsession with black gangstas and ghetto street culture is a product line, the illusion that it is unadulterated remains. So everyone "agrees" that rap music, despite its extraordinary expansion as a brand, is a truth from the streets of the black ghetto, uninfluenced by corporate agendas for profit, by white desire to consumer black violence and sexual excess, and by rappers' own desire to feed such desire with their own financial gain. This collusion of denial supports the belief that "authentic" black people are criminals, that being poor is a "black thing," and that corporate-sponsored rap has no impact on hip hop content or in any way shapes our access to hip hop artists.⁷⁶

Molefi K. Asante describes the consumer base as "45 million Hip-Hop consumers between the ages 13–34, 80% are white and has \$1 trillion in spending power."⁷⁷ With the majority of CD sales and illegally downloaded music by white suburban youth, mainstream rap becomes a way that white youth "know" black male reality while also making the systems of dominance and subordination invisible at the same time. As my student's comment illustrates, "Blackness becomes a 'known' commodity through these stereotypes" of black men in

mainstream rap.⁷⁸ David Theo Goldberg explains this phenomenon of simultaneously being “known” and being invisible: “Invisibility also happens when one does not see people because one ‘knows’ them through fabricated preconception of group formation.”⁷⁹

This knowing but unknowing for white people is profoundly disturbing. Andrew Rojecki points out that the media images of black people substitute for relationships between white people and black people. In a society that continues to be racially segregated these media images are how white people “know” black people and take the place of sustained contact or conversation.⁸⁰ Rose notes that in her own teaching, “I am consistently struck by white students’ genuine appreciation of hip hop and their simultaneous ignorance of the racial issues that swirl around the music, that govern their investment.”⁸¹

There are many moral problems that arise from this substituting of representation for relationship. One problem is a white voyeuristic approach to black life. Justin D. Ross describes this dynamic for white hip-hop fans,

Across the country, white kids in comfortable suburban neighbourhoods (mine was the Greenbelt) sit in their cars or bedrooms or studio apartments, listening to the latest rap music that glorifies violence, peddles racist stereotypes and portrays women as little more than animals. We look through the keyhole into a violent, sexy world of “money, ho’s and clothes.” We’re excited to be transported to a place where people brag about gunplay, use racial epithets continually and talk freely about dealing drugs. And then we turn off whatever we’re listening to and return to our comfy world in time for dinner.⁸²

CONCLUSION

Well beloved let’s get down to business . . .

Public Enemy⁸³

Ross’s disturbing description of young white people looking through the key hole of mainstream hip-hop into the fiction of black life reveals how a whole generation of people are being socialized into the habitus of white privilege and racism. This description of listening to mainstream hip-hop clearly illustrates white racial identity as an imprisoned cultural identity.⁸⁴ As Mikulich has so clearly detailed, our white habitus involves the four walls of isolation, lies, amnesia, and addiction to white domination.⁸⁵ White listeners pay for the fictional account of black life and are enthralled and feel “cool” listening to its lie. White listeners can experience a sense of release from their lives by

fantasizing about the transgressive behavior of fictional black people they then return to the privileges provided by their white skin. As one commentator explains,

There is nothing wrong with one community learning the cultural forms produced by another, if it respects their specific shapes and meanings. There is something horribly wrong with a dominant community repeatedly co-opting the cultural forms of oppressed communities, stripping them of their vitality and form, the heritage of their creators and then popularizing them. The result is bleached Pepsi culture masquerading as the real thing. This is what threatens to dilute the real feeling and attitude of hip hop preventing its genuine forms the freedom to fully develop. The expression of Black people is transformed when it is repackaged without any evidence remaining of the Black historical experience.⁸⁶

Mainstream hip-hop becomes a way for white listeners to indulge in the fantasy of looking through this keyhole, while remaining distant from real black people. This activity of black male hypervisibility makes whiteness invisible—to us. Regarding hyper-incarceration, mainstream hip-hop for white listeners is “driven by the familiar sense of attraction and repulsion that manifests itself in the desire to consume and to destroy the object of this fear and desire.”⁸⁷ In other words, as one male student said, “It’s cool to act all ghetto but I don’t want to go to prison!”

I would argue that the stakes of what I have described in this chapter are even more serious, moreover deadly. Recently, the Hiller Armament Company created a shooting target with the image of a black figure in a hoodie holding an ice tea and skittles with the crosshairs of a two-ring bull’s eye in the center of the chest.⁸⁸ One seller of these targets has alleged that he sold out the targets in two days.⁸⁹ A description of this target reads, “Everyone knows the story of Zimmerman and Martin . . . Obviously we support Zimmerman and believe he is innocent and that he shot a thug.”⁹⁰ According to WKMG, an Orlando radio station, the seller (who did not identify themselves by name) claimed their motivation “was to make money off the controversy.”⁹¹ As I write this Adidas is being criticized for its new “shackle” sneaker called the *JS Roundhouse Mids*. The tagline for the sneaker is “Got a sneaker game so hot you lock your kicks to your ankles?”⁹² Adidas insists that the shackle design has nothing to do with slavery.⁹³ *Really?*

There is so much to comment upon in these two incidents, particularly in relationship to understanding the continual mythologizing of the dangerous black man in America. The creation and marketing of

this target and sneakers are deserving of an entire chapter in our text.⁹⁴ These cultural events are disturbing enough, but what may be even more troubling is how they are dismissed and trivialized. For example, the website with these targets was taken down, no further action taken. Adidas has withdrawn this shoe and denies it has anything to do with slavery. Individuals and companies will often deny any racist (sexist or homophobic) intent, they may issue an apology, and the incident is understood to end there. Often people will respond that this is “just a joke.” On a public level the dominant culture views these incidents as isolated, controversial because of the result of individual interpretation (and oversensitivity), and deemed to be not conscious or intentional.

To make connections between hip-hop, sneakers, the history of slavery, and hyper-incarceration to many seems absurd. Some readers may argue that my analysis is overreaching to make connections between what appears to be disparate elements of American life. In the United States we lack the collective capacity to meaningfully understand and take responsibility for cultural phenomenon that reinscribes oppression. As Michael Potter observes, “The central trope of white[ness] is, I think, the luxury not to think doubly, to see the world through one-eyed vistas of privilege, rather than having to account for one’s identity against a fundamentally multiple culture.”⁹⁵ As I have been demonstrating in this second section of our book, these are not random cultural phenomena but are elements of the hegemony of racism and white privilege in America.

What I have been describing is the cultural production of evil. The evil of this cultural production is a nihilism in regard to human value, particularly all human beings as God’s image and likeness. As Catholic social ethicists we need to take seriously Massingale’s call for US Catholic ethical reflection to “adopt a structural and systemic approach to racism.”⁹⁶ Massingale insists that this systemic approach must approach racism and white privilege as also a cultural phenomenon. He writes, “Effective moral analysis and action require understanding racism as a culture of white advantage, privilege, and domination that has derivative personal, interpersonal and institutional manifestations.”⁹⁷ We need to create a language that takes these cultural sites, such as contemporary music as truly moral phenomena. We need to create a language of cultural sin, which makes intelligible the collective quality of this human creation. This cultural sin of racism that makes common sense of social sin of hyper-incarceration. Collectively, as Catholic social ethicists we need to begin interrogating cultural sites and collectively ask: How is this cultural expression

related to a history of oppression? Does the cultural process, practice, or artifact disrupt or reinscribe the matrix of domination? Does this cultural site imply or legitimate violence toward specific groups of human beings? So as God's beloved(s), let's get down to business!

NOTES

1. D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex and Suspicion*, p. 29.
2. *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2007), p. 45.
3. Some readers may question how a middle-aged white woman can write about hip-hop, and moreover critique its present enactment. Explaining my own relationship to hip-hop may clarify my standpoint and purpose as a white woman and Catholic theologian writing about this cultural site. Growing up in the 1980s East Coast "old school" hip-hop offered me a very different vision than mainstream rap on the radio or MTV does today. Listening to Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five I realized that entertainment and values did not have to be separated. The lyrics of Salt-N-Pep gave me a language to resist everyday experiences of sexism. The rhymes of House of Pain got me thinking critically about my Irish American identity. Requesting "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy at a club in Boston was one of my first lessons in the racial politics of this music. The club's white DJ said, "We don't pay *that kind* of music here!" When I asked, "*What kind* of music *that* was?" He only replied by saying he did not want to start any trouble in the club. Working with young people in Dorchester furthered these lessons. The young people at St. Paul's parish taught me hip-hop was truly a CNN about America for those who would listen. Listening to young people in Dorchester, Mattapan, and Jamaica Plain enabled me to see connections between the music and the everyday experience of people of color. Hip-hop was one avenue of my becoming conscious of racism and white privilege. Though I did not plan to pursue these connections academically, students at Trinity College and Marywood University challenged me to do so, for which I am very grateful.
4. M. Shawn Copeland, "Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse" in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse* ed. Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui Lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 180–198.
5. My focus in this chapter is primarily on images of black men. It must be said that hip-hop's roots are not only within the African American community. Hip-hop draws from Caribbean music, especially from Jamaica and also music from Puerto Rico. See Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Some scholars claim

- that hip-hop's hybridity comes from its urban roots, drawing upon the diverse and international character of American cities. See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 38. For more on the contested nature of hip-hop's influences see Toure, "The Hip-Hop Nation: Whose Is It?," *New York Times* (August 22, 1999).
6. Michael Eric Dyson, "The Culture of Hip-Hop," in *That's the Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 67–68.
 7. bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 151.
 8. Public Enemy, "Between Rock and a Hard Place," *How You Sell Soul to A Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul???*
 9. Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop and Why it Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. ix.
 10. Ibid.
 11. My focus in this chapter is the image and voice of black men seen in the cultural site of hip-hop. The voices of women like MC Lyte, Queen Latifah and Salt-n-Pepa, Lauren Hill, Roxanne Shanté, and Monie Love in Old School hip-hop and women in global underground hip-hop deserve their own chapter to adequately account for their work, their contribution, and their struggle. See Cheryl L. Keyes, "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance," *That's the Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 265–276.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Jeff O. Ogbar, *Hip Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), p. 16.
 14. Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-soul Aesthetic* (New York, 2002), p. 24.
 15. Michael Eric Dyson, "The Culture of Hip-Hop," in *That's the Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 61.
 16. "Standpoint theory argues that group location in hierarchical power relations produces shared challenges for individuals in these groups. These common challenges can foster similar angles of vision leading to a group knowledge or standpoint that in turn can influence the group's political action. Stated differently, group standpoints are situated in unjust power relations, reflect those power relations, and help shape them." Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998), p. 201.

17. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 180.
18. For more on these activities see Jeff Chang, ed. *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Basic Civitas Books, 2006); Soren Baker, *A History of Rap and Hip Hop* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Thomson-Gale, 2006); Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, eds. *That's the Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2011). For an more elaborate definition of hip-hop see Anthony Pinn, *Why Lord?* (New York: Continuum, 1995), pp. 125–132.
19. Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2010), p. 44.
20. Ibid., p. 37. This quotation is from The Temple of Hip Hop, a website run by KRS-One.
21. Eric Michael Dyson, “The Culture of Hip-Hop,” p. 66.
22. Ibid. 66.
23. Ibid.
24. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p. 21.
25. For more on this see (2004) movie *Letter to the President* directed by Thomas Gibson and produced by Russell Simmons. The message of Grand Master Flash is a thick description, through cultural expression, of what the American Catholic Bishops critiqued in *Economic Justice for All*. For more on the economic oppression of people of color and how the bishops’ pastoral response see Alex Mikulich, “Where Y’at Race, Whiteness and Economic Justice: A Map of White Complicity in the Economic Oppression of People of Color”, in *The Almighty Dollar: Reflections on Economic Justice for All*, ed. Mark J. Allman (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2012), pp. 189–213.
26. Grand Master Flash-The Message Lyrics at <http://www.metroclitics.com> (accessed February 3, 2006).
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30. Boogie Down Productions, “Who Protects Us from You?,” *Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip Hop* (Jive/Zomba Records, 1989).
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32. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, p. 120.
33. William Eric Perkins, “The Rap Attack: An Introduction,” in *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 18.

34. NWA "Fuck Tha Police," *Straight Outta Compton* (Priority, 1988).
35. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, p. 128.
36. Jason Tanz, *Other People's property: A Shadow History of Hip Hop in White America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 137.
37. Jason Tanz, *Other People's Property*, p. 137.
38. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, p. 128.
39. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, p. 128.
40. Dave Marsh and Phyllis Pollack, "Wanted for Attitude," *Village Voice*, 10 October, 1989, pp. 33–37.
41. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, p. 102.
42. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, pp. 102–103.
43. Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), p. 80.
44. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, pp. 108–109.
45. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, p. 108. See Jody Armour, *Negrophobia and Reasonable Racism: The Hidden Costs of Being Black in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
46. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, p. 108.
47. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, p. 108.
48. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, p. 109. See Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
49. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, p. 109.
50. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, p. 109.
51. Eric Michael Dyson, *Know What I Mean? Reflections on Hip Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2007), pp. 98–106.
52. Kendal Thomas, "'Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing' Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity," in *The House that Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), pp. 116–135.
53. For an overview of Bryon Hurt's film *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* in William C. Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 40–43.
54. For an excellent analysis of this issue see Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip hop—and why it matters* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), pp. 113–132, 149–166.
55. This idea is found in the work of Stuart Hall, Stanley Cohen, and Simon Watney and is applied to critique of hip-hop by Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 90–91.
56. Jeffrey Ogbar, *Hip Hop Revolution*, pp. 118–119. See Robert Bork, *Slouching towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), pp. 130–131.

57. Ibid., p. 124. See John McWhorter, "How Hip Hop Holds Blacks Back," *City Journal* (Summer 2003), http://www.city-journal.org/html/13_how_hip_hop.html.
58. bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 115.
59. Kathryn Russell-Brown, *Underground Codes: Race, Crime and Related Fires* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 54.
60. Ibid., p. 51.
61. Tricia Rose, "Rap Music and the Demonization of Young Black Males," *USA Today Magazine* 122 (May): 35.
62. Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), p. 1.
63. Mark Lewis Taylor, "Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit: Rap as Spiritual Practice," in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*, ed. Anthony Pinn (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 108.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., p. 109.
66. Ibid., p. 119.
67. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 182. "What you trying to pull eatin' us like cannibals/Whatever happened to that forty acres and that animal/Now you trying to use integration just to fool us/Like Malcolm said we been hoodwinked and bamboozled." DA Smart, "Where Ya At?"
68. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters*, p. 181. The danger to the actual lived existence of women—particularly black women of the misogyny of gansta rap deserves sustained attention. See Traci West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 129–133.
69. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters*, p. 184.
70. Reiland Rabaka critiques the categories of conscious and commercial hip. He notes and rightly so that Old School hip hop was not all about politics, but also about partying. *Hip Hop's Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement* (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 200–207. I would note, however, even the partying music by artists like the Sugar Hill Gang promoted community and did not promote the toxic images of black people, particularly black men as seen in mainstream commercial hip-hop today.
71. S. Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), p. 127.
72. S. Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, p. 127.

73. bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 152.
74. Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), p. 221.
75. Ibid., pp. 222–223.
76. Ibid., p. 223.
77. Molefi K. Asante, *It's Bigger than Hip-Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), p. 113. Asante gives a detailed analysis of the white corporate control of mainstream hip-hop as a form of neo-colonialism.
78. Traci West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, p. 59.
79. David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 80.
80. Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, p. 230.
81. Ibid., p. 231.
82. Justin D. Ross, "Offended the Rap's on Me," *Washington Post* (September 9, 2007). Quoted in Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, p. 233.
83. Public Enemy, "Fight the Power," *Fear of a Black Planet*.
84. Joseph Brandt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 215.
85. For more on this idea of the four walls of white imprisonment see Joseph Brandt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, pp. 129–141.
86. This comment is by Tony Van Der Meer and quoted in M. Elizabeth Blair, "Commercialization of the Rap Music Subculture," in *That's the Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Muray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 497.
87. Linda C. Tucker, *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), pp. 131–132.
88. Ironically, Public Enemy has as their logo a black man in the crosshairs of a target. Their name Public Enemy bespeaks the meaning of this logo. These rappers have continually rhymed about black men as a "public enemy" and a target of violence in the United States. Hiller's *real* target seems to prove the veracity of their claim.
89. "Trayvon Martin Gun Targets Sell Out in Florida," *The Griot*, NBC News (May 11, 2012) at thegrio.com/2012/05/11/florida-entrepreneur-sells-trayvon-martin-gun-range-target-hoodies-and-sells-out/ (accesses June 25, 2012).
90. David Edwards, " 'Trayvon Martin' Gun Range Targets Sold Out In Two Days," *The Raw Story* (Friday May 11, 2012)

at www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/05/11/trayvon-martin-gun-range-targets-sold-out-in-two-days/ (accessed on June 25, 2012).

91. "Trayvon Martin Gun Targets Sell Out in Florida," *The Griot*, NBC News (May 11, 2012) at thegrio.com/2012/05/11/florida-entrepreneur-sells-trayvon-martin-gun-range-target-hoodies-and-sells-out/ (accessed June 25, 2012).
92. Perry Chiaramonte, "Addidas Blasted Over New 'Shackle' Sneaker," *FoxNews.Com* (June 18, 2012) at www.foxnews.com/us/2012/06/18/public-outcry-after-adidas-announces-racist-shackle-sneaker/ (accessed June 25, 2012).
93. Ibid.
94. It is ironic to have Adidas design these "kicks" in light of how popular Run-DMC made this company's sneakers when they recorded the rap, "My Adidas." This fact deserves its own article. For more on this connection of Run-D.M.C. and Adidas see Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Penguin, 1998), p. 158.
95. Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and Politics of Post-modernism* (1995) ft. 207 at 20. cited in D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, p. 67.
96. Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, p. 42.
97. Ibid.

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PART III



SPIRITUALITY

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CHAPTER 5



A SPIRITUALITY OF WHITE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE TO THE REALITY OF HYPER-INCARCERATION

Margaret Pfeil

There is no easy way to create a world where men and women can live together, where each has his own job and house and where all children receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But if such a world is created in our lifetime, it will be done in the United States by Negroes and white people of good will. It will be accomplished by persons who have the courage to put an end to suffering by willingly suffering themselves rather than inflict suffering upon others. It will be done by rejecting the racism, materialism and violence that has characterized Western civilization and especially by working toward a world of brotherhood, cooperation and peace.¹

Writing in 1743, a young Quaker named John Woolman recounted the experience of being asked by his employer to draft a bill of sale for another Quaker to take possession of a slave.

The thing was Sudden, and though the thoughts of writing an Instrument of Slavery for one of my fellow creatures felt uneasie, yet I remembered I was hired by the year; that it was my master who [directed] me to do it, and that it was an Elderly man, a member of our society, who bought her; so through weakness I gave way, and wrote it, but at the Executing it I was so Afflicted in my mind, that I said before my Master and the friend, that I believed

Slavekeeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian Religion: this, in some degree, abated my uneasiness, yet as often as I reflected seriously upon it I thought I should have been clearer if I had desired to be Excused from it, as a thing against my conscience, for such it was.²

Faced with a similar situation sometime later, Woolman wrestled with the awkwardness of refusing to write the will of a slave owner, only to find tremendous spiritual consolation in his chosen path of integrity:

I spake to him in the fear of the Lord, and he made no reply to what I said, but went away: he himself had some concerns in the practice, and I thought he was displeased with me. In this case I had a fresh confirmation, that acting contrary to present outward interest, from a [motive of Divine love, and in] regard to Truth and Righteousness, and thereby incurring the resentments of people, opens the way to a treasure which is better than silver, and to a friendship Exceeding the friendship of men.³

Woolman's experience lifts up a number of points to consider in light of previous chapters. First, twelve years after Nat Turner's rebellion, the practice of slavery was so culturally and legally normative for white people that even self-professed members of one of the traditional Christian peace churches, the Quakers, could sell black human beings among themselves seemingly without difficulty, moral or otherwise. This practice represented an assumed part of white *habitus*. As Joseph Barndt notes, they inhabited the context of colonial America, shaped by the two main ideological principles of colonization: white supremacy and the function of people of color in service of white people.⁴

Second, in light of this context, Woolman had to correlate his emerging dilemma of conscience with the reality at hand and make a case to his employer explaining his refusal to broker yet another sale of a black person. Only with considerable effort was he able to elicit from his fellow Christian pacifist some admission of "concerns in the practice" of slavery. Evidently, slavery did not qualify as a violent institution and therefore something Quakers at the time would reject as a violation of their faith commitment.

What constituted the moral ground of reality for these two Quakers? The broader social, cultural, economic, political, and legal context not only condoned but facilitated as normative the practice of slave trading among white people. Having long before been conferred the status of normativity in the dominant white culture, its morality seemed beyond question. More than two centuries later, offering insight into the civil rights movement, Thomas Merton would notice the same cultural dynamic according white racism ethically normative

status even when it so egregiously violated the moral norms of white Christians' faith commitments:

But we know from experience with other notorious historical forms of fanaticism, that societies which "experience their reality" on this oniric and psychopathic level are precisely those whose members are most convinced of their own rightness, their own integrity, indeed their own complete infallibility. It is this experience of unreality as real, and as something to be defended against objective facts and rights as though against the devil himself, that produces the inferno of racism and race conflict.⁵

As Alex Mikulich noted in Chapter 1, the culturally dominant norms of whiteness mean that objective facts of the present and past, such as the violent violation of Christian belief in creation of humans *Imago Dei* through the institutions of slavery and hyper-incarceration, go unacknowledged. This phenomenon represents what Gregory Baum has called false consciousness, involving the broad-based cultural assumption of objective, morally disordered patterns of behavior and institutionalized practices as normatively right. Baum identifies false consciousness as an important manifestation of systemic sin. Similarly, Blessed Pope John Paul II invoked the language of "structures of sin" to identify morally disordered economic and social systems that "often function almost automatically."⁶

Woolman's narrative adumbrates a path of Christian nonviolence as a spiritual discipline of resistance to slavery in the United States of his time that may offer a promising means of resisting forms of slavery in our contemporary context as well. As seen in earlier chapters, Loïc Wacquant and Michelle Alexander have made a compelling case for regarding the current system of hyper-incarceration in the United States as a kind of neo-slavery.

THE BEATITUDES: A FRAMEWORK FOR A NONVIOLENT SPIRITUALITY OF WHITE RESISTANCE

As part of his commitment to nonviolence as a way of being in the world, Mahatma Gandhi cultivated the spiritual practice of reading the Sermon on the Mount every day. Along with Merton, he understood what many Christians have never grasped: The text of Mt. 5:1–7:28, and the Beatitudes in particular, provides a spiritual wellspring for the ascetical practice of nonviolence as a way of life.⁷ By correlating the Beatitudes with elements of the experience of Woolman and other exemplary practitioners of active nonviolence, the shape of a spirituality of contemplative nonviolent resistance emerges, one hopefully

supple enough to grapple with the complexities of white privilege and hyper-incarceration.

In focusing on the outlines of a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance, there is a risk of once again reinforcing white cultural dominance. Can a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance succeed in decentering the white subject culturally and institutionally? Here, the Beatitudes offer some hopeful (and even salvific) guidance. As Glen Stassen has noted, the Beatitudes do not represent high ideals to be achieved through individual effort—one of the marks of dominant white culture. Rather, they point to

God's gracious deliverance and our joyous participation. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says we are blessed because God is not distant and absent; we experience God's reign and presence in our midst and will experience it even more in the future. Therefore each beatitude begins and ends with the joy, the happiness, the blessedness of the good news of participation in God's gracious deliverance.⁸

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Woolman grew in his capacity to mediate God's love transparently through a beatitudinal poverty that connoted material detachment as well as an interior freedom marked by the humility of the meek. Jesus' way involves pursuit of truth as part of liberation, and this process begins first of all with interior freedom, encompassing the depth and breadth of one's whole manner of being in the world. Perceptively, James Douglass poses a question to himself and to all who take up the path of nonviolence: "How far would we like to go in?"⁹ For white people trying to face the truth of white complicity in the system of hyper-incarceration, with its reverberations in every aspect of US society, this question serves as a portal to the spiritual discipline, or *askesis*, of a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance to hyper-incarceration.

For his part, Woolman gradually developed a spiritual asceticism of nonviolence that sought to affirm the dignity of all human life by stripping away all enslaving attachments. He declined lodging and transportation provided at the cost of exploitation, shunned dyed clothing, sugar, and the use of silver vessels due to the oppressive labor conditions by which they were wrought, and refused to pay war taxes.¹⁰

Over time, he chose to limit his own income as a means of cultivating spiritual freedom by deepening his friendship with God. Faced with a dominant culture characterized by a voracious desire to possess

not only goods but people as well, Woolman became convinced of the power of God's love to free humanity by stoking a desire to love what God loves. "There is a Love which stands in Nature; and a Parent beholding his Child in Misery, hath a Feeling of the Affliction, but in Divine Love, the Heart is enlarged towards Mankind universally, and prepar'd to sympathize with Strangers, though in the lowest Stations of Life."¹¹

Speaking at the Riverside Church in New York City one year to the day before his assassination, with the carnage of the Vietnam War rising to a bloody crescendo, Martin Luther King, Jr., drew the systemic connection between US militarism, materialism, and racism, putting his finger on the cultural assumptions of whiteness that underpinned slavery, stoked the drive toward the war in Vietnam, and still persist in the present US context in the form of hyper-incarceration. Advocating a radical revolution of values in the United States, King urged, "We must rapidly begin to shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."¹² Writing just a few years earlier, Merton also noticed that both the national defense system and systemic racism in the United States involve the sacrifice of the person and personal rights to systemic interests: "It is not really the person and his rights who come first, but the system. Not flesh and blood, but an abstraction."¹³ Ultimately, all persons' interests are superseded in the dominant white US culture by the interests of business, Merton rightly perceived:

It seems to me that we have little genuine interest in human liberty and in the human person. What we are interested in, on the contrary, is the unlimited freedom of the corporation. When we call ourselves the "free world" we mean first of all the world in which *business* is free. And the freedom of the person comes only after that, because, in our eyes, the freedom of the person is dependent on money.¹⁴

In drawing these systemic connections and living out of their implications, King and Merton had a kindred spirit in Dorothy Day, cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement. To those who objected to her pacifism during World War II, Dorothy pointed out the passivity of comfortable US Americans in the face of the race and class wars ravaging their society while the war raged, as if these manifestations of violence were not of a piece.¹⁵ The Catholic Worker

community's longtime retreat director, Fr. John Hugo, wondered at the hypocrisy of Americans in condemning Hitler's treatment of the Jews while upholding Jim Crow laws in their own country.¹⁶ In the face of these interrelated structures of hatred and fear, Dorothy exhorted the Catholic Worker houses of hospitality to wield the works of mercy as spiritual weapons on the frontlines of American inner cities, beginning right in their own neighborhoods with the people on their own streets. Like Woolman two centuries earlier, she understood that structural transformation aligned with the revolution of values that King advocated must stand in dynamic interrelationship with personal conversion expressed in very concrete lifestyle practices.

Voluntary poverty was an essential component of her active nonviolence because with the mystics, she understood the spiritual interrelationship of possession, violence, and ego. As Dorothy Sölle noted in her work *The Silent Cry*, a fortress of ego undergirds human attachment to material goods, facilitating use of violence in defense of possessions.¹⁷ In the white-knuckled grip of possessions, one comes finally to the point of being completely possessed by them, ultimately forfeiting one's very identity to them. Dante's moneylenders come to mind here, absorbed forever on the outer reaches of the seventh circle of hell by loveless fascination with the moneybags strung around their necks.¹⁸ For them, consummate absorption in possessions meant the final consumption of their humanity. In the end, they found not egolessness but the implosion of personal identity, rendering them incapable of loving self-gift in relationship to God and other human beings.

On the other hand, as Sölle notices, "[b]ecoming empty or 'letting go' of the ego, possession, and violence is the precondition of the creativity of transforming action."¹⁹ Thus, following John of the Cross' insight that the fullness of love unfolds along the way of nothingness,²⁰ Day turned to Thérèse of Lisieux as an exemplar who witnessed the truth of stripping oneself of attachment to material things and to one's very self.²¹ Of Thérèse's response to the trials and daily "pinpricks" of convent life, Day wrote, "She knew she had 'to die in order to live' and that every wound meant a killing of the ego."²² Thérèse herself described such detachment as true poverty of spirit.²³

The ascetic discipline of dying to self is at the heart of a nonviolent spirituality of resistance to racism. As Bryan Massingale put it, "Racial solidarity is a *paschal* experience, one that entails a dying of a false sense of self and a renunciation of racial privilege so as to rise to a new identity and a status that is God-given."²⁴ In the Birmingham civil rights protest, Merton found a call to white people to embark

upon personal conversion and structural transformation. That witness of nonviolent resistance, undertaken by children among others, called whites to recognize “that the cancer of injustice and hate which is eating white society and is only partly manifested in racial segregation with all its consequences, *is rooted in the heart of the white man himself*.”²⁵ If white people were truly to internalize this loving, courageous witness, Merton was convinced, “they would cease to be the people they were. They would have to ‘die’ to everything which was familiar and secure. They would have to die to their past, to their society with its prejudices and its inertia, die to its false beliefs.”²⁶

Like Woolman, King, and Day, Merton readily grasped that this paschal journey would entail a total transformation of white *habitus*, manifested in both its interior and exterior dimensions:

If they are forced to listen to what the Negro is trying to say, the whites may have to admit that their prosperity is rooted to some extent in injustice and in sin. And, in consequence, this might lead to a complete re-examination of the political motives behind all our current policies, domestic and foreign, with the possible admission that we are wrong. Such an admission might, in fact, be so disastrous that its effects would dislocate our whole economy and ruin the country.²⁷

Considering the implications of the web of complicity represented by the “giant triplets” of racism, militarism, and materialism, true human freedom for each and every person in US society will involve just this sort of personal and structural transformation. It is indeed the paschal mystery to which Jesus invites his followers.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted

A disposition of mourning the almost total separation from God’s love entailed by systemic racism enables those complicit in white privilege to begin to notice the depth of loss at stake in hyper-incarceration. In his own day, contemplating the devastating reality of slavery and the morally corrupt sense of white superiority underlying it, Woolman grieved this structural violence out of a profound sense of God’s mourning for God’s creation. Writing in his journal of slaves he encountered on a visit to Quakers in Virginia in 1757, he records:

These are a people by whose labour the other inhabitants are in a great measure supported, and many of them in the luxuries of life. These are a people who have made no agreement to serve us and who have not forfeited their

liberty that we know of. These are souls for whom Christ died, and for our conduct toward them we must answer before that Almighty Being who is no respecter of persons.

They who know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, will therein perceive that the indignation of God is kindled against oppression and cruelty, and in beholding the great distress of so numerous a people will find cause for mourning.²⁸

Institutionalized desecration of God's creation *Imago Dei* elicits divine mourning; it is a systemic violation of God's justice. As Woolman perceived, systematic dehumanization clearly involves what Amartya Sen has identified as capability deprivation: Stripped of the opportunity to develop one's gifts and talents fully, the oppressed person is deprived of full human flourishing.²⁹ The data presented in earlier chapters paint a picture of wholesale, intergenerational devastation visited particularly upon US black males between the ages of 15 and 24 and their families through the system of hyper-incarceration in the form of intellects undereducated or miseducated by the system of internalized domination, marriages broken or foregone altogether, children unborn, children without fathers, jobs lost, health deteriorated, and lives shortened.³⁰

Can white people mourn this devastation as *our own* and accept our complicity in it? Can we understand the flourishing of each and every human being in society as intimately interconnected and bound up with our own integral well-being? In his 1987 encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Blessed Pope John Paul II spoke of the virtue of solidarity as "not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is *a firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual because we are *all* really responsible *for all*."³¹

This thick account of the common good must ground the understanding of racial justice as part of a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance. Woolman, over the course of his life, came to understand himself in deep and interdependent relationship with each person and every person. While he appealed to his fellow Quakers for the abolition of slavery, he did so from the standpoint of the oppressed, out of a profound grief. As a practitioner of nonviolence, he was determined not to contribute to their further suffering and to dedicate his energies toward dismantling the structures of oppression. He might well have embraced as his own Joseph Barndt's insight about white cultural racism:

I am suggesting that our white racial identity is an imprisoned identity When we examine white cultural identity, we are asking how whiteness has been a source of injury and harm, not only for people of color, but also for ourselves as white people. The cultural curtain has harmed not only people of color by locking them out, but has also harmed us by locking us in.³²

For those of us complicit in white oppression of people of color, beatitudinal mourning must involve the sort of death to self witnessed by Woolman, Douglass, and Day. It is a death to the selfish love incarnated in white *habitus*. Massingale writes,

For the beneficiaries of white privilege, lament involves the difficult task of acknowledging their individual and communal complicity in the past and present racial injustices. It entails hard acknowledgement that one has benefited from another's burden and that one's social advantages have been purchased at a high cost to others.³³

As part of the spiritual discipline of nonviolent white resistance, it will involve the dynamic unfolding of personal conversion *as part of* structural transformation. As James Perkinson notes,

Practically, for most white people today, however[,] antiracist conversion implies at least some measure of real material contraction expressed as a form of social expansion. It implies pursuing a more equal circulation of assets, opportunities, and power that will simultaneously be experienced as a form of real loss. Sharing control is also giving up control, at least in the moment of fear. Seen in this way, whiteness emerges theologically as a task of mourning. It involves learning to see where, in one's own life-world, whiteness as a naïve (or not so naïve) practice of terror intersects with one's own personal struggles with fear, and getting help in not contributing that fear toward practices of exclusion that already structure our common social field.³⁴

Stassen prefers an adaptation of Clarence Jordan's translation of this beatitude: "Joyful are those who are deeply saddened to the point of action, for they will be comforted."³⁵ The Greek word, *penthountes*, often translated as "mourning," means both deep sadness and repentance, Jordan noticed.

Christians who pray for God's reign to come are all the more aware that what is happening in themselves and their society is far from God's reign. Their prayer life compares God's compassion for all people with the suffering, violence, injustice, and lack of caring that hurt people; they are realists as to the causes of the wrong. They truly want to end their sinning and serve God.³⁶

A Scripture scholar with an agricultural background, Jordan founded an interracial cooperative pecan farm, *Koinonia*, in his native Georgia in 1942, in an effort to dismantle racist culture and practices through Gospel-inspired communal solidarity and participation.³⁷

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

Woolman's experience seems to confirm an insight of Merton, namely, that integrity and humility amount to "practically the same thing."³⁸ Freed interiorly to be true to oneself before God, the humble person becomes radically free for relationship with the rest of God's creation. In the concrete practice of nonviolence, humility, rooted in radical trust in God's love, enables one to refuse any resort to "evil or suspect means," Merton insisted.³⁹

Conceiving of humility as steps of spiritual progress on the ladder of earthly life leading toward that "*perfect love of God which casts out fear* (1 Jn. 4:18)," Benedict of Nursia contrasted the ascent in humility with the downward journey of pride.⁴⁰ As part of temperance, Aquinas observed, humility serves to restrain the movement of passion evidenced "by preoccupation with earthly greatness."⁴¹ Humility "mainly concerns a man's subjection to God, for whose sake he also submits himself to others."⁴²

Beatitudinal meekness, Merton noticed, frees one

to renounce the protection of violence and risk being humble, therefore *vulnerable*, not because he trusts in the supposed efficacy of a gentle and persuasive tactic that will disarm hatred and tame cruelty, but because he believes that the hidden power of the Gospel is demanding to be manifested in and through his own poor person. Hence in perfect obedience to the Gospel, he effaces himself and his own interests and even risks his life in order to testify not simply to 'the truth' in a sweeping, idealistic and purely platonic sense, but to the truth that is incarnate in a concrete human situation, involving living persons whose rights are denied or whose lives are threatened.⁴³

Proceeding from a humble place of being true to that of God in himself and others in the very concrete circumstances of his context of white cultural dominance, Woolman was able to come to a fundamental insight of nonviolence as a path of spiritual resistance: Interior liberation represents the work of God's love and the precondition for detachment from material goods and right relationship among humans.

I have felt an increasing Care to attend to that Holy Spirit which sets right bounds to our desires, and leads those who faithfully follow it to apply all the gifts of Divine Providence to the purposes for which they were intended. Did such who have the care of great Estates, attend with singleness of heart to this Heavenly Instructor, which so opens and enlarges the mind that Men love their neighbours as themselves, They would have wisdom given them to manage, without ever finding occasion to employ some people in the Luxuries of life, or to make it necessary for others to labour too hard: But for want of regarding steadily this Principle of Divine love, a selfish Spirit takes place in the minds of people, which is attended with darkness & manifold confusions in the world.⁴⁴

Woolman was not indulging here in wistful parenesis; he was exercising moral imagination to envision what might be possible if Christians actually enfleshed the love of God and neighbor to which they were called and consecrated in their baptismal commitment to follow Jesus. Merton affirmed his approach as a central aspect of nonviolent resistance: “The mission of Christian humility in social life is not merely to edify, but *to keep minds open to many alternatives*.”⁴⁵

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled

Stassen raises the real concern that in US culture, righteousness may easily be heard as self-righteousness, exactly the opposite of what is meant by this beatitude. He advocates the use of “restorative justice” instead of righteousness here to convey a twofold understanding of the sort of justice at stake:

It means delivering justice (justice that rescues and releases the oppressed) and community-restorative justice (justice that restores the powerless and the outcasts to their rightful place in the covenant community). . . . This is . . . why the hungry and the thirsty hunger and thirst for righteousness; they yearn bodily for the kind of justice that restores them to community where they can eat and drink.⁴⁶

Woolman’s witness also reveals the power of keen contemplative awareness capable of rigorous systemic analysis springing from his hunger and thirst for righteousness. In his refusal to draft the slaveholder’s will, Woolman engaged in a careful discernment of the moral truth at stake. Like Gandhi’s experiments with truth two centuries later, he used the ethical dissonance that emerged in this experience as fertile ground for imagining and generating an alternative

response when faced with a similar situation in the future. That method, in time, would unfold as a creative new way of life, one attuned to Woolman's increasingly refined conscience and rooted in his faith-based commitment to nonviolence.

His discernment process also demonstrated a sharp contemplative sensibility to the intricate details of this particular incident. This enabled him to notice explicit, systemic connections between the institution of slavery and morally disordered cultural assumptions. One such assumption entailed the seemingly limitless bodily and spiritual degradation of black people in the service of total white dominance. Woolman repeatedly decried the culture of white greed and sloth undergirding the slave trade, naming, the *systemic* moral degradation feeding the voracious cultural reproduction of white dominance. Like Dante's moneylenders, practitioners of slavery became captive themselves, losing touch with their own humanity as they grasped after possession of other human beings.

He that hath a Servant, made so wrongfully, and knows it to be so, when he treats him otherwise than a free Man, when he reaps the Benefit of his Labour without paying him such Wages as are reasonably due to free Men . . . these Things, tho' done in Calmness, without any Shew of Disorder, do yet deprave the Mind in like Manner and with as great Certainty as prevailing Cold congeals Water. These Steps taken by Masters, and their Conduct striking the Minds of their Children, whilst young, leave less Room for that which is good to work upon them.⁴⁷

The neo-slavery of hyper-incarceration uses the prison as a powerful, race-based mechanism of cultural, social, political, legal, and economic exclusion. But those benefiting from the system of hyper-incarceration through white privilege create for ourselves an interior form of bondage, constituted by the four walls of isolation, lies, amnesia, and addiction to white domination that Alex Mikulich addressed in Chapter 2.⁴⁸ We white people, the slave masters, are ourselves enslaved and cut off from the liberating energy of God's love.

More than two centuries later in the heat of the civil rights movement, Merton argued "that American society *has to change* before the race problem can be solved" (34). He named clearly the need for white people to see the black struggle for civil rights "as a manifestation of a deep disorder that is eating away the inner substance of our society, *because it is in ourselves.*"⁴⁹

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

A test for the integrity of one's practice of nonviolence, Merton held, is:

Are we willing to *learn something from the adversary*? If a *new truth* is made known to us by him or through him, will we admit it? Are we willing to admit that he is not totally inhumane, wrong, unreasonable, cruel? . . . If he sees that we are completely incapable of listening to him with an open mind, our non-violence will have nothing to say to him except that we distrust him and seek to outwit him.⁵⁰

Through an open, dialogical, and nondefensive approach, the practitioner of nonviolent white resistance participates in the power of God's mercy to soften the hardened heart, beginning with one's own.

Eileen O'Brien recounts the view of Vanessa, an antiracist activist of color, regarding qualities in white activists that engender her trust and open up the possibility of authentic relationship: "I look for that self-analysis I look for a willingness to take whatever criticisms I may have without being defensive. Sort of accepting that and [being] willing to have the conversation that that might be true." ⁵¹

As Barbara Applebaum argues, this sort of humble openness to self-interrogation is essential for white exploration of our complicity in racism. She recalls the narrative of one of her African American students:

She said that it was difficult for the white students in class to imagine what it is like to wake up every morning and walk into a world where skin color alone might determine who one is perceived to be and how one is treated. She explained how she must be constantly vigilant to survive in such a world—one in which she never knows when she might be treated "as Black." Given this, isn't it important for white people to develop a corresponding (although not comparable, since their survival does not depend on this vigilance) alertness because the effects of whiteness are so often indiscernible to us/them? If the web that the marginalized are enmeshed in is supported by whiteness, and if whiteness works best when it is invisible, white people need to develop attentiveness to those who experience marginalization and to attune themselves to how and when one might be complicit or wrongly deny complicity.⁵²

For white people, mercy involves compassionate alertness to the perspective and experience of the oppressed and suffering person, letting that reality transform and inform our understanding of what God's merciful love requires. Woolman came to grips with his own complicity and that of the Society of Friends in the institution of

slavery and systemic economic exploitation of laborers across the empire of his time first by allowing the experiences of particular oppressed people, black slaves, and other exploited workers to reshape his own way of life. Out of this changed pattern of behavior and social location, he engaged his fellow and sister Quakers in loving but challenging communal discernment of complicity.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Arun, remembers vividly how he learned of the centrality of penance as part of the self-purification essential for one who practices nonviolence. As a teenager growing up in South Africa, he failed to fulfill a promise made to his father and then lied about it. That evening, when he went to pick his father up and drove him 18 miles back to their home, his father confronted him about the deception. "I am sorry you lied to me today. Obviously, I did not instill in you the confidence and courage to tell the truth without fear. I must do penance for my shortcoming, so I am going to walk home."⁵³ Arun trailed slowly after him in the car for five and a half hours along dark, dirt roads, absorbing the painful reality of his father undertaking an arduous penitential practice on his account.

Arun's father and grandfather both firmly held that the practitioner of *satyagraha*, or truth force, ought not to seek to impose penance on others but rather to undergo it oneself. Through this practice, little by little, one comes face to face with all the manifold impulses toward the violence of dominative power within one's own heart and way of being. "To resist and encounter truly the powers," James Douglass affirms, "becomes a process of acknowledging that *I* am a major source of their power to kill others."⁵⁴

The white privilege that justifies and maintains the system of hyper-incarceration rests upon a radical distortion of the *Imago Dei*, the human being's self-understanding as created in God's own likeness. That disfigurement begins first within the soul and psyche of the white person, and so the work of nonviolence in disarming white privilege must start there.

This process of self-purification serves to strip away the false self, freeing one to receive God's love ever more transparently and to cooperate with its dynamic, inexorable movement to restore the brokenness caused by sin. Accepting violence within myself becomes part of my "yes" to go deeper in my commitment to the path of Jesus' love in disarming social systems of domination. Without rootedness in God's love for God's own creation, a gratuitous and infinitely forgiving love,

Douglass predicts that the nonviolent resister's path will end either in self-hatred or in self-righteousness. But, "self-emptying love for others—*all* the others...—is the radically liberating reality capable of supporting resistance beyond an adolescent awareness of self.... Love liberates me from evil's source of division in my self and makes me whole in a greater Reality."⁵⁵

For Christians, Jesus reveals the path of self-emptying love for those desiring to become pure of heart. Along the way, Day discovered,

The love of God and man becomes the love of equals, as the love of the bride and the bridegroom is the love of equals... [T]he relationship we hope to attain to is that of the love of the Canticle of Canticles. If we cannot deny the *self* in us, kill the self-love, as He has commanded, and put on the Christ life, then God will do it for us. We must become like Him. Love must go through these purgations.⁵⁶

This process of purification as part of a spirituality of nonviolent resistance to racism takes a very concrete, incarnate form. White people have much to learn from the witness of Dr. King and the other nonviolent activists who took to the streets in Birmingham in 1963. Before taking direct action, their preparations involved self-purification. King recalled: "We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, 'Are you able to accept blows without retaliating? Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?'"⁵⁷ As a spiritual discipline, beatitudinal purity of heart holds the potential to turn the system of hyper-incarceration on its head. Are white people willing to suffer physical imprisonment ourselves as a consequence of meeting systemic violence and racial hatred with love? Spiritually, this may be a necessary implication of interior liberation from the prison of white racism.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God

The blessing of peacemakers envisions restoration of the humanity of all involved in a situation of systemic dehumanization. For US white people, hyper-incarceration mirrors the evil within us. Active nonviolence invites us to hold that growing awareness of our own sinful complicity in structures of white privilege together with a related question: "How can I find God in my enemy?"⁵⁸ That question takes us, if we are honest, deep within ourselves.

A spiritual *askesis* of nonviolent white resistance creates space for the practitioner to face the darkness within one's own heart. Over time it becomes more and more possible to place my trust not in my

own capacity to disarm the violence within and without, but rather in the infinite power of the Spirit of God's love at work in the world, continually healing and reconciling creation. This contemplative spiritual practice is essential for coming to a free, loving white racial identity. Rooted in the *askesis* of Gospel nonviolent love, US white people can strive in solidarity with other human beings in the beloved community and find our lives in God by losing them.

Only then can we take the next step on the spiritual path of nonviolence, as Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Day practiced it—to seek the opponent's good by freeing that person from oppressive actions.⁵⁹ As a US white person, the first oppressor to be freed is myself, and it is God who, by grace, liberates each person through love. Spiritually, how do I surrender to God's vast, unrelenting gift of merciful love? By grace, ultimately; but, through the spiritual *askesis* on nonviolent resistance, I can learn to wait and listen for God's movement in a spirit of open surrender.

Nonviolent contemplation in action opens ground for the interior liberation required. Constance FitzGerald describes John of the Cross' approach in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (1.4.8):

[Divine Sophia] challenges those who are unfree, consumed by the possessive desire for what can never completely satisfy. She calls them "little ones" because they become as small as that which they crave, while the lasting affection and reassurance they unconsciously search for in their choices are present and available in Sophia. Therefore, Sophia says, "desire me": "O people, I cry to you, my voice is directed to all that live. Be attentive, little ones, to cunning and sagacity; and you ignorant, be careful . . . The fruit you will find in me is better than gold and precious stones . . . [Prv. 8: 4–6; 18–21]."⁶⁰

This dynamic freeing is the fruit of God's love. Knowing oneself to be loved and forgiven by God, the practitioner of nonviolence loves the oppressor into freedom, beginning with oneself. Having practiced this way of life assiduously for quite some time, Woolman found that he was able to extend compassionate love to other white people enslaved by possessive desire. His journals contain several accounts of the disarming effect of his loving interactions with slave owners.

[A] neighbor received a bad bruise in his body, and sent for me to bleed him, which being done he desired me to write his will. I took notes and amongst other things he told me to which of his children he gave his young Negro woman. I considered the pain and distress he was in, and knew not how it would end, so I wrote his Will save only that part concerning his Slave, and, carrying it to his bed-side read it to him, and then told him in a friendly

way, that I could not write any Instruments by which my fellow creatures were made slaves without bringing trouble on my own mind. I let him know that I charged nothing for what I had done, and desired to be Excused from doing the other part in the way he propos'd. Then we had a serious conference on the Subject, and at length he agreeing to set her free I finished his will.⁶¹

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

and

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

Contemplating the meaning of nonviolent resistance, Merton understood the larger horizon at stake in these last two Beatitudes: Against the background of the reign of God, one can better discern the demands of the truth of Jesus' love in very concrete, everyday circumstances. "Non-violence," he wrote,

is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient self-interest, even political, from its considerations. In a very real sense, he who practices non-violent resistance must commit himself not to the defense of his own interests or even those of a particular group: he must commit himself to the defense of objective truth and right and above all of *man*.⁶²

Naming and dismantling structures of racism emerges clearly as a claim of truth and right upon all Christians in US society, especially upon white Christians as beneficiaries of systemic racism. A spirituality of nonviolent white resistance to hyper-incarceration will involve total and trusting surrender to God's love, and this will include acceptance of persecution in the spirit of solidarity with all human beings who suffer, particularly the most vulnerable and oppressed.

Remembering the children involved in the civil rights protest in Birmingham, Merton finds in their witness the way of Jesus' love that all Christians must follow, including the awesome act of loving one's oppressor into freedom:

They were also, in their simplicity, bearing heroic Christian witness to the truth, for they were exposing their bodies to death in order to show God and

man that they believed in the just rights of their people, knew that those rights had been unjustly, shamefully and systematically violated, and realized that the violation called for expiation and redemptive protest, because it was an offense against God and His truth.... These Negroes are not simply judging the white man and rejecting him. On the contrary, they are seeking by Christian love and sacrifice to redeem him, to enlighten him, so as not only to save his soul from perdition, but also to awaken his mind and his conscience, and stir him to initiate the reform and renewal which may still be capable of saving our society. But this renewal must be the work of both the White and the Negro together.⁶³

Rooted in profound respect for the dignity of each and every person, nonviolent resistance appeals to the human freedom of the would-be adversary: "Instead of forcing a decision upon him from the outside," Merton wrote,

it invites him to arrive freely at a decision of his own, in dialogue and cooperation, in the presence of that truth which Christian non-violence brings into full view by its sacrificial witness. The key to non-violence is the willingness of the non-violent resister to suffer a certain amount of accidental evil in order to bring about a change of mind in the oppressor and awaken him to personal openness and to dialogue.

Echoing King's Riverside Church address, Merton noted that the person-oriented approach of nonviolence focuses not on control but rather on appealing to human dignity by awakening one's free response to love.⁶⁴

Writing from the Birmingham City Jail, King chose to respond to a letter from white (and outwardly free) Alabama clergy objecting to his practices of nonviolent resistance. In a tone of gentle but direct and challenging love, King noted, "You deplore the demonstrations that are presently taking place in Birmingham. But I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being."⁶⁵ Though incarcerated bodily, King appealed from a place of deep spiritual freedom, rooted in God's love, to his white fellow clergy, recognizing their spiritual, mental, and emotional bondage. As a counterexample to complacent, white Christian ecclesial practice that so readily reinforced institutionalized racism, King called their attention to the nonviolent witness of the early Christians. In whatever town they entered, "the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being 'disturbers of the peace' and 'outside agitators.' But they went on with the conviction that they were 'a colony of heaven' and had

to obey God rather than man.”⁶⁶ The persecution they suffered came as they responded to God’s invitation to love God’s creation as God loves it.

Contemplating the witness of the King and the Birmingham protestors can be an ascetical spiritual practice of nonviolent resistance in the face of hyper-incarceration. Viewed against the horizon of God’s reign, what collective action of resistance do the current signs of the times demand of anti-racist white people? Massingale turns to the work of Joe Feagin to name the sort of “transformative love” that becomes manifest “when whites intentionally place themselves, ‘if only partially, into the racist world of the oppressed and thereby not only receive racist hostility from whites but also personally feel some of the pain that comes from being enmeshed in the racist conditions central to the lives of the oppressed others.’”⁶⁷ Stassen recalls that the *Koinonia* community in Georgia has endured racist drive-by shootings (with a visiting Day among their targets), business boycotts, and expulsion from the local Southern Baptist worship community. But, it went on to incubate Habitat for Humanity and continues to thrive in the present day.⁶⁸ As the name *Koinonia* suggests, this antiracist and multiracial community of nonviolent resistance set its sights on the larger horizon of the transformative love of God’s reign, enabling them to persevere in right relationship, attempting to love their oppressors into openness to God’s liberating love.

CONCLUSION

John Woolman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Clarence Jordan, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, the young Birmingham marchers, Gandhi and his grandson—all have given witness to the nonviolent spirituality of resistance that emerges so clearly in the Beatitudes. Rather than a strategy or technique, it represents a way of being in the world that in itself constitutes an act of resistance. Subverting the institutions and culture of white *habitus*, the Beatitudes lead toward a radically antiracist praxis: Poverty of spirit; mourning and lament; humility; a longing for restorative justice that leads to committed, collective action; compassionate mercy; single-heartedness; peacemaking; and submission to the inevitable persecution that such praxis will elicit.

The next chapter will explore further the implications of this nonviolent spirituality of white resistance in relation to the US institutional and cultural reality of racism and hyper-incarceration.

NOTES

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," in *A Testament of Hope. The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 61.
2. The Journal and Essays of John Woolman, ed. Amelia Mott Gummere (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), *Journal 1743*, p. 161. For a general account of John Woolman's antiracism, see also Herbert Aptheker, *Anti-Racism in U.S. History. The First Two Hundred Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1993), pp. 76–78.
3. *Journal 1754*, p. 175.
4. Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism. The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 155.
5. Thomas Merton, "Letters to a White Liberal," in *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964), pp. 48–49.
6. Blessed John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Encyclical Letter, 1987), #16, accessed online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html on July 9, 2012. Official Catholic social teaching texts are cited by paragraph number.
7. See Thomas Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," in *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 17.
8. Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount. A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), p. 43.
9. James Douglass, *Resistance and Contemplation*, pp. 46–47, in conversation with the cover of Bob Dylan's album, *John Wesley Harding*.
10. See *Journal 1761*, pp. 246–248, *Journal, 1770*, p. 283, and *Journal, 1772*, pp. 308–310, 312, 330; Dorothy Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 243–246; Reginald Reynolds, *The Wisdom of John Woolman* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1981), p. 6ff.
11. Woolman, *Last Essays*, "On the Slave Trade," in *The Journal of John Woolman*, pp. 499, 500–501; cf. *Last Essays*, "On Loving Our Neighbours as Ourselves," pp. 488–496.
12. King, "A Time to Break Silence," in *A Testament of Hope*, p. 240.
13. Merton, "Letters to a White Liberal," p. 16.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
15. Dorothy Day, "Politics and Principles," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 264.
16. John Hugo, "The Law of Love," *Catholic Worker* (June 1943), in *Weapons of the Spirit*, ed. David Scott and Mike Aquilina (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997), p. 163.

17. Sölle, *The Silent Cry*. I have developed this connection between Dorothy Day's commitment to voluntary poverty and to active nonviolence more fully in "Active Nonviolence in Times of War: The Witness of Dorothy Day," *Journal for Peace & Justice Studies* 13, no. 1 (2003): 19–30.
18. See Inferno, Canto XVII, "The Divine Comedy," in *The Portable Dante*, ed. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 89–92.
19. Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, p. 253.
20. "Pride," in William D. Miller, *All Is Grace. The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 97.
21. Cf. Dorothy Day, *Thérèse* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers, 1960), p. 88.
22. Day, *Thérèse*, p. 128.
23. *Story of a Soul. The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. John Clarke, O. C. D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976), p. 226.
24. Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 121.
25. Merton, "Letters to a White Liberal," pp. 45–46.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
28. John Woolman, "1757," in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1971), pp. 65–66.
29. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), pp. 87–110.
30. See Joe R. Feagin and Karyn D. McKinney, *The Many Costs of Racism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Yanick St. Jean and Joe R. Feagin, "The Family Costs of White Racism: The Case of African American Families," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 29, no. 2 (1998): 297–312).
31. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, #38, emphasis in the original.
32. Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, p. 215.
33. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, p. 111.
34. James W. Perkinson, *White Theology. Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 234.
35. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 45, citing Clarence Jordan, *The Sermon on the Mount*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson, 1974), p. 22.
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37. For more on the history of Koininia Farms, please visit <http://www.koinoniapartners.org/>. See also Clarence Jordan, *Essential Writings*, selected with an introduction by Joyce Hollyday (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003).
38. Thomas Merton, "Integrity," in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972, first published 1961), p. 99.

39. Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," p. 23.
40. Timothy Fry, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict in English* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 7.67, emphasis in original.
41. *ST II-II* 161.5 *ad* 4; cf. 161.4 *sed contra*.
42. *ST II-II* 161.1 *ad* 5.
43. Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," p. 18–19.
44. *Journal 1756*, p. 184; cf. *Journal 1772*, p. 331.
45. Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," p. 24.
46. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 52.
47. "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes (Part II)," *The Journal of John Woolman*, pp. 380–381.
48. See Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, pp. 129–141.
49. Merton, "Letters to a White Liberal," p. 38.
50. Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," p. 23.
51. Eileen O'Brien, "The Political Is Personal: The Influence of White Supremacy on White Antiracists' Personal Relationships," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 261.
52. Barbara Applebaum, "Race Ignore-ance, Colortalk, and White Complicity: Race Is . . . Race Isn't," *Educational Theory* 56, no. 3 (2006): 345–362 at 353–354.
53. Arun Gandhi, *Legacy of Love. My Education in the Path of Nonviolence* (El Sobrante, California: North Bay Books, 2003), p. 103.
54. James Douglass, *Resistance and Contemplation*, p. 188.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
56. Dorothy Day, "November," in *On Pilgrimage*, p. 235.
57. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James W. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986, 1991 paperback), p. 291.
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60. Constance FitzGerald, "Transformation in Wisdom: The Subversive Character and Educative Power of Sophia in Contemplation," in *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness*, ed. Kevin Culligan and Regis Jordan (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000), p. 289.
61. *Journal 1756*, pp. 180–181.
62. Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," p. 14, emphasis in the original.
63. Merton, "Letters to a White Liberal," pp. 44–45.
64. Merton, "Blessed Are the Meek," pp. 27–28.
65. King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," p. 290.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

67. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, p. 118, quoting Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 254–255, with modification of verbs for plural forms.
68. For more information on Habitat for Humanity, see <http://www.habitat.org>

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CHAPTER 6



CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION: TOWARD WHITE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE TO HYPER-INCARCERATION

Margaret Pfeil

And if black people fall into this trap, the trap of believing that they deserve their fate, white people fall into the yet more stunning and intricate trap of believing that they deserve their fate and their comparative safety and that black people, therefore, need only do as white people have done to rise to where white people now are. But this simply cannot be said, not only for reasons of politeness or charity, but also because white people carry in them a carefully muffled fear that black people long to do to others what has been done to them. Moreover, the history of white people has led them to a fearful baffling place where they have begun to lose touch with reality—to lose touch, that is, with themselves—and where they certainly are not truly happy for they know they are not truly safe. They do not know how this came about; they do not dare examine how this came about. On the one hand they can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession—a cry for help and healing which is, really, I think, the basis of all dialogues and, on the other hand, the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which fatally contains an accusation. And yet if neither of us cannot do this each of us will perish in those traps in which we have been struggling for so long.¹

James Baldwin's 1965 assessment provides an appropriate starting point for considering how a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance

might relate to white complicity in US hyper-incarceration. It suggests a direction for the development of white antiracism that the Crossroads Ministry has taken. Specifically, three tasks emerge: First, white people must work to make whiteness visible. Second, white people need to be accountable to people of color in the work of antiracism. Finally, white people need to work as antiracist allies of people of color in imagining and enacting systemic change.

Contemplative, collective action toward dismantling the system of hyper-incarceration will need to spring from strong spiritual roots, as noted in Chapter 5. In light of the all-encompassing claim of white *habitus*, the process of building a multiracial, antiracist community of resistance capable of collective, strategic action against hyper-incarceration will depend upon an ongoing process of deepening personal consciousness *together and supported by one another* in community. The antiracist work at hand is at once both intimately personal and essentially social and cultural.

Thus, the specific details of a strategic action plan to dismantle the system of hyper-incarceration will need to emerge from a process of engagement among antiracist white people and people of color as a community of resistance. Toward that end, the restorative justice practice of the peacemaking circle may provide a useful framework within which both white people and people of color can name the truth of racism's effects and begin to develop a common analysis of racism together.

The Carmelite concept of the dark night of impasse helps to illuminate the specifically spiritual and theological dimensions of this task. As the beatitudes suggest, a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance to hyper-incarceration will entail a gradual process of dying to oneself, becoming more and more interiorly detached from the possessive claims of material goods and of the ego. This process can be nurtured through specific, communal practices of resistance, including witness, memory, and lament, as Shawn Copeland has suggested.

MAKING WHITENESS VISIBLE: COMPLICITY

Barbara Applebaum addresses three prominent examples of subtle racism that arise among her students: so-called color-blindness, meritocracy, and individual choice. All of these forms obscure the visibility of whiteness. "The colour-blind approach," she argues, "ignores the contemporary social reality of racism and obscures not only the race of the victims of racism but also dispenses with the need to interrogate whiteness as the invisible norm by which others are marginalized.

In fact, the assumption that one can be colour-blind and transcend social contingencies is a privilege that only the experiences of the dominant group confirm.”² Furthermore, in a later essay, Applebaum advocates a shift in language from “colorblind” to “color ignorance,” noting the ways in which the use of the term “colorblind” reinforces pejorative stereotypes around other-abled people.³

The meritocracy strand of white invisibility depends upon a key aspect of white culture in which a white person counts as an individual who deserves all benefits that come his or her way because he or she has earned them on their own. But, a person of color is regarded only or primarily as a member of a racial or ethnic group, making it difficult if not impossible to attribute achievement to that person as an individual. These are two sides of the same coin, the currency of white culture. “The ability to deny the presence and power of current everyday racism and the undeserved benefits that some groups accrue at the expense of others is premised on the ability to see oneself ‘as an individual’ and not to see oneself ‘as white.’”⁴

Correlatively, the invisibility of whiteness finds support in the myth of individual choice, accorded only to white people: As Peggy McIntosh noted in her seminal piece on white privilege, “I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will.”⁵ Therefore, in a particular situation of racial injustice like US hyper-incarceration, a white person might conclude that he or she is not complicit because they have not acted directly in support of that system. Missing from that analysis, however, is an awareness of the systemic complicity of white people in accepting the privileges of white culture that hyper-incarceration helps sustain. Applebaum notes, “To focus primarily on individual choice allows one to ignore how race is relational, how racial identity gets constructed and how one might be implicated in that construction, regardless of one’s good intentions.”⁶

As seen in earlier chapters, the task of making whiteness visible is an essential aspect of confronting white complicity in hyper-incarceration. Applebaum writes, “White complicity connects individuals to systems in which the privileges of some are relationally predicated upon the unjust exclusions of others. White people perform and sustain whiteness continuously, often without conscious intent, often by doing nothing out of the ordinary.”⁷ To make whiteness visible and to encourage white people to interrogate our own complicity in racial oppression, Applebaum suggests posing the question, “How might I be complicit in sustaining rather than challenging systemic oppression and white privilege?”⁸ Specifically, how might I be

complicit in sustaining rather than challenging the system of hyper-incarceration in the United States? Answering these questions will unfold as a process and will require development of a deep contemplative awareness of the interrelated personal and social dimensions of the structural sin of white superiority discussed in Chapter 4 and its particular institutional manifestations, including but not limited to the system of hyper-incarceration.

To work toward dismantling the walls of hyper-incarceration will require of white people the interior deconstruction of the four imprisoning walls of internalized white racist superiority addressed in Chapter 2, the walls of separation and isolation, lies and illusions, amnesia and anesthesia, and the addictive wall of white privilege.⁹ It is a spiritual path of personal conversion leading to structural transformation. The journey toward structural dismantling of the system of hyper-incarceration will need to begin at the personal level with the cultivation of awareness for each white person of his or her own white racial identity and its cultural roots. The “comfortable prison” of internalized white racist superiority “maintains itself by a conspiracy of silence,” Joseph Barndt insists.

But we must begin on a personal level. Are you aware of learning the lie—either explicitly or with subtlety—that some people are better than others, and that white people are better than people of color? Even if you never consciously believed it, are you aware that you learned to accept and live comfortably in a world shaped on this belief? What can you remember about your socialization as a white person? What can you remember about what you were taught about people of color? What made you a ready receptacle to accept white power and privilege? What made you able to pretend we are all equal and then live comfortably with the reality that we are not? . . . Try to identify yourself living within [the prison of white racism] and to remember how you were taught to be a part of its collective life.¹⁰

Barndt’s questions lead to deep examination of personal and social conscience. Reading them, I immediately recalled an exchange with McIntosh during her plenary address at a conference on white privilege that I organized at Notre Dame.¹¹ She began her talk by recalling her hometown: an all-white, affluent suburb of New York City. As she shared more details, I realized that she was describing the place where I grew up and asked, “Was it Ridgewood?” Yes, it was, she replied. Then she asked, “But did you grow up Catholic?” When I responded affirmatively, she said, “Ah, then as a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant in the Ridgewood culture, I experienced one more layer of privilege over you.”

I felt inwardly the soul sickness of the insidious perversity of white privilege in which Christians craft our own internal hierarchies of superiority. Peggy's WASP culture may have regarded Catholics as inferior, but remembering my white Catholic ghetto culture, our lived reality held just the opposite as true: In that context, for a long time after Vatican II, the cultural, if not official, Catholic belief still held fast to the pre-conciliar teaching that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church. Not only were white Catholics racially superior, but we also enjoyed the possibility of salvation.

And while the Catholics and WASPs of Ridgewood were busy establishing our superiority over one another, who was actually living out the Gospel call of the beatitudes and undertaking the work of antiracism? Thinking about Barndt's questions, I recalled my earliest experiences of being socialized into white racist superiority and began to see Ridgewood for what it was: an exceedingly comfortable prison of white racism, home to several white members of the New York Yankees, the manager of the New York Mets, and the commissioner of Major League Baseball, who was a member of our parish. If the hyperdeveloped US sports culture is part of white people's institutionalized stupefaction, as Baldwin held, Ridgewood was home to the nation's leading white "anesthesiologists," the institutional gatekeepers of white *habitus* living less than 30 miles from the inner-city New York neighborhoods where hip-hop developed.¹² That our whole way of life depended on the systematic capability deprivation of the great majority of the world's people, and that most of them were people of color, were carefully concealed facts. As earlier chapters demonstrate, hyper-incarceration developed as a system to protect white ghettos like Ridgewood, further cementing its fortress-like walls of racist imprisonment.

Each white person is shaped by a particular experience of becoming socialized into white *habitus*, and each of us has particular work to do in coming to fuller awareness of our complicity in racism. Earlier in this volume, Sr. Helen Prejean, Alex Mikulich, and Laurie Cassidy each shared specific experiences of their respective personal narratives. In each case, they gradually became aware of their own white complicity in the racist institutions and cultural reality of white *habitus*, while at the same time recognizing that their personal experiences and formation were necessarily social.

Alex's initial reaction of fear and anger at the African American Scholars Conference upon seeing a shirt emblazoned with the words "KILL THE WHITE MAN" reflected his own formation in white *habitus*. His fear was his own; but at the same time, it was socially

constituted by his formation in the culture of white *habitus*. In this way, the personal and social aspects of whiteness are radically interrelated, and so too, then, are the personal and social aspects of coming to deeper awareness of the meaning of whiteness.

Tempted to leave the conference, at that moment Alex remembered his communal partners and teachers in antiracist work at Sacred Heart Parish and at St. Anthony's social service agency in San Francisco. Strengthened by the lived memory of their solidarity, he chose to stay at the conference and to engage in the interior and exterior, personal and social struggle of coming to grips with whiteness. He needed the community of scholars gathered there to help him come to awareness at a deeper level of the real meaning of the shirt's words and to recognize that his status as a beneficiary of white privilege had distorted his view of social reality. His process of coming to deeper personal consciousness as a white person was at once intimately personal and socially situated.

Precisely because white *habitus* shapes every aspect of our way of being in the world, and humans are social beings, as a white person, I need to engage with other white people in the process of coming to ever greater awareness of white complicity in the racist institutions and culture of white *habitus*. It will involve a commitment to grow toward greater personal consciousness and at the same time a collective and communal commitment of white people to undertake the common work of naming white complicity, by way of becoming antiracist allies of people of color. This step is part of what it means for white people to be accountable to people of color.

With regard to hyper-incarceration, the task of cultivating deeper collective awareness among white people might benefit from communal consideration of further questions for discernment: As a white person, what do I make of Baldwin's stomach-churning essay on the virulent sexual violence bound up in the systemic practice of lynching and in the white supremacist reaction to the civil rights movement, and particularly to the nonviolent protest songs of lament and hope?¹³ Do I recognize the same strands of white soul sickness that would lead to the further white objectification of black souls and bodies through the mass commodification of hip-hop music and culture? Do I see connections to the sexual violence of feminicide on the US-Mexico border involving the systematic sexual torture, mutilation, and murder of young Latina women, many of whom are *maquiladora* laborers?¹⁴ Do I notice the matrix of white power involved in the *simultaneous* advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement with the epidemic of feminicide and my comfortable prison of privilege in which

most material goods from around the world are made constantly available at the lowest possible monetary price but drenched in the blood tax of unspeakable human suffering? And does my way of life, enjoyed by only a tiny, mostly white fraction of the world's population, depend directly upon the extension of the hyper-incarceration model to the rapidly growing private prison industry created to detain undocumented, mostly Latin@ people along the US-Mexico border under the institutional supervision of US Immigration and Custom Enforcement?

ACCOUNTABILITY AND AWARENESS

Barndt succinctly states what is at the heart of the task of contemplative awareness for white people in resisting white racism:

While you and I may be ready to confront our identities as individual white persons, it is far more difficult to view the white community as "our people." One reason for this is that when we accept our personal relationship as part of the white culture, the past protective barrier falls away that allows us to claim personal innocence; for when we accept our identity as part of a group, then we have to also accept responsibility and be accountable for what that group does.¹⁵

His account reflects the experience of Nancy, a white antiracist activist:

I've learned over the years how much I have to do to be willing to come back and work in the white community and work on antiracism with white people.... And that was the hardest trip I've ever had to make... was from living very, very comfortably in African-American neighborhoods and living with my friends, and surrounded by predominantly African-American culture and stuff, to saying it is my responsibility, if I mean that sincerely, to make this move and work with white people.¹⁶

Fostering healthy, racially aware relationships among white people becomes part of the process of cultivating authentic relationships with people of color. Eileen O'Brien recounts the view of Vanessa, an antiracist activist of color: "How white antiracists respond to their white peers is the most important criterion for her in determining whether she can truly have an authentic relationship with that person: 'Call your peers to the table! My main quest would be that this is all good and great, but we would get along even better if I saw you sticking your neck out there, calling your own folks to the table.'"¹⁷

As Barndt and Crossroads Ministry emphasize, antiracism work begins with the development of a common analysis of racism as a collective work of antiracist white people and people of color in communities of resistance. The practice, or spiritual asceticism, of caucusing is an essential part of this process: "White people and people of color dedicate time to be apart from each other, with the objective of each group helping participants identify and deal therapeutically with negative socialization and building new antiracist self-images and identities. The result of this caucusing process is that the separate groups are then prepared to come together with more effective cross-racial relationships."¹⁸

For white people, cultivating humility as a spiritual discipline is an essential aspect of nonviolent resistance and makes possible white accountability to people of color. It is the spiritual antidote to the soul sickness of internalized white racist superiority and its attendant institutional and cultural manifestations. In antiracism work, it constitutes the spiritual precondition of any effective white participation. "Under white supremacy," O'Brien writes,

Whites have been trained to not have to take into consideration "other" worldviews, so any strategy they propose for ending racism may unintentionally come across as arrogant to people of color who have had to adopt a "double consciousness" to survive. Further whites have had the privilege of being judged solely as individuals and hence expect that. Those white antiracists who struggle for empathic relationships with people of color not only strive to reduce personal prejudice and discrimination but humble themselves to alternative interpretations of their actions, understanding that they occupy a privileged position in white supremacy that has little to do with their individual convictions.¹⁹

THE CIRCLE PROCESS: A PUBLIC SPACE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Antiracist white people and people of color need respectful spaces of public dialogue in order to build antiracist communities of resistance, and a restorative justice approach may offer helpful resources. Kay Pranis, a leader in restorative justice theory and practice, notes, "One of the most important contributions made by restorative justice programs is the creation of 'public spaces' in which questions of our expectations of one another and our feelings about those expectations being violated can be spoken and heard."²⁰

Pranis has been instrumental in facilitating training in the peacemaking circle process as a particular practice that creates a public

space of trust, dignity, respect, and accountability. I suggest that the circle process could prove very fruitful in supporting the development of white awareness, antiracist commitment, and accountability to people of color as part of dismantling the system of hyper-incarceration. Toward that end, it may be helpful to consider the deeper meaning and guiding values of the circle process as a practice of restorative justice.

The peacemaking circle process has long roots in indigenous, non-Western traditions, including the Canadian aboriginal tradition. Symbolically, the circle receives and holds the Creator's gift of vision to First-Nation Peoples. This way of seeing implies a distinctive manner of assigning value and meaning to created reality, but it also involves a hermeneutic of radical interdependence. All elements of creation stand in relation to one another, the well-being of each one bound up with that of the rest.²¹

Perhaps precisely out of an awareness of radical interdependence and as an expression of solidarity, First-Nation Peoples have trained nonindigenous communities, including white people, in the circle process. Carolyn Boyes-Watson considers the meaning of the circle process as a gift of First-Nation Peoples in her study of an urban youth organization in Chelsea, Massachusetts, that has adopted the circle process as a way of encouraging cultural and institutional transformation in the face of systemic violence affecting their community. Members of the Tagish/T'lingit People and others trained by them worked extensively with Roca, a youth development organization, to help them practice the circle process. "Perhaps they gave this gift in the hope that non-Native Peoples would learn a way of being in relationship that is different from the institutionally arrogant, hierarchical, and controlling patterns that have brought such suffering to Native Peoples Certainly the gift of Circles reflects the deep wisdom that we are all in this together."²²

Living into such awareness of the radical interdependence of all God's creation is at the heart of a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance to hyper-incarceration. As Boyes-Watson intimates, the values grounding the circle process render it a practice of resistance to the institutional and cultural symptoms of white *habitus*.

Among the general principles that guide the peacemaking circle process, the first names these values as the basis for engagement. It holds that participants' articulation of and commitment to a set of shared values sustains and shapes the circle. These include the protection of human dignity, individual and collective accountability, procedural equity, and free and voluntary participation on the part of all stakeholders. Commitment to these values serves the interests of

social justice by nurturing the well-being of all members of society as persons who flourish only in relationship to one another.²³

Restorative justice practitioners frequently note the divergence of this approach from the adversarial mode characteristic of the Anglo/Western justice system in which each side, driven at least in part by fear of vulnerability, seeks to gain advantage at the other's expense.²⁴ The system of hyper-incarceration feeds upon the US judicial system's binary division, whether explicit or implicit, of prosecution/defense, victim/offender, good/bad, rich/poor, and black/white. Restorative justice measures, on the other hand, are designed to disarm the fear and distrust that spring from and contribute to systemic violence.

Upholding personal and communal values in the dialogical process of the circle engenders respectful engagement, a second guiding principle of peacemaking circles.²⁵ "If I had to put restorative justice into one word," Howard Zehr writes, "I would choose respect: respect for all, even those who are different from us, even those who seem to be our enemies If we pursue justice as respect, we will do justice restoratively."²⁶

To cultivate a culture of respect, the circle process relies upon a third guiding principle: All those directly affected by a particular aspect of the injustice in question participate in righting the wrong done. Toward that end, they typically employ a consensus model of decision making that entails attentiveness to the needs of all parties concerned.²⁷ While the interests of those gathered may conflict, the momentum of the process is generative rather than divisive as participants strive toward a decision that represents the collective wisdom of the group. Even when the outcome falls short of consensus, the process itself reflects procedural justice. By taking into account the view of every stakeholder, this approach to decision making forges stronger communal relationships and encourages participants to embody the kind of peace that they seek.

A hermeneutic of peace is the fourth guiding principle and is related to discernment in the circle process regarding the specific requirements of justice. Perhaps the Hebrew word *shalom* most adequately captures the integral well-being that characterizes the peace sought. Deriving from the Sumerian root *silim* and the Akkadian *s'ala'mu*, "to be whole, uninjured,"²⁸ *shalom* connotes threefold right relationship. It refers, first, to adequate satisfaction of one's material and physical needs and, second, to the embodiment of just personal and social relationships. Third, as a prerequisite for entering into rightly ordered relationships, *shalom* also implies personal integrity.²⁹ The

concept of *shalom* establishes an ethical horizon of peace as the end of all work for justice. The just person will strive to restore all that disrupts personal and communal well-being and will refuse to settle for a false peace as the mere absence of violent conflict. Thus, a restorative justice approach would foster communal exploration of whether the common assumptions of white invisibility outlined above by Applebaum lead toward *shalom* of right relationship or rather to a false peace that further inscribes the systemic violence of white racism. It would call into question the commonly accepted myth that the system of hyper-incarceration contributes to the true peace of US society in service of the common good.

Based on her extensive field experience, Pranis has argued that restorative justice practices can lead to social justice only if they reflect shared guiding values and involve structures of communication capable of compensating for disparities of power and wealth among the stakeholders.³⁰ In the circle process, one means of addressing power issues among participants is to employ a symbol bearing meaning for the community, known as a talking piece. It gets passed around the circle from person to person, allowing each one to exercise his or her right and responsibility to participate in the deliberations without interruption and regardless of any power differentials that may exist among them.³¹

In the context of racial justice, the circle process could be a very useful practice for antiracist white people and people of color to caucus as groups and also to meet as a multiracial community of resistance and develop a common analysis of racism leading toward a strategy of action. Recalling Vanessa's plea to white people to call their white peers to the table as part of accountability to people of color, the circle process provides a framework for undertaking that work of engagement. Swimming in the ocean of white *habitus*, which values, inscribes, and reinforces isolation, it may seem daunting to white people even to know how to begin a conversation with other whites about our complicity in racism and in hyper-incarceration. The circle process offers a respectful, public space for white people to dialogue with one another and with people of color as part of building an antiracist community of resistance committed to collective action.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE: FACING THE DARK NIGHT OF IMPASSE

Carmelite Sister Constance FitzGerald has written compellingly of the relationship between the impasse of John of the Cross' "dark night of the soul" and its societal manifestations. An impasse marks a limit

situation in which one's usual categories of reference prove inadequate to address the challenge at hand. The only way beyond the impasse is through the painful movement from familiar modes of thought and action toward new options that come to light precisely in the darkness of crisis.³²

Spiritually, white antiracists face just such a dark night. Our task involves the painful struggle of confronting white *habitus* while being fully immersed in and shaped by it. The white antiracist imperative to engage and even confront other white people about internalized white racist superiority and its institutional and cultural manifestations bears its own pain and price. The pervasively formative power of white *habitus* involves at a fundamental level the affectivity of white people, making real growth in awareness of and acceptance of accountability for white complicity in racism extremely difficult.

The first task at hand for antiracist white people is to name this spiritual struggle. Through the practice of nonviolent resistance, white people can enter fully into the dark night experience, finding there, by God's grace, the interior freedom necessary for collaborative, communal engagement with other whites and with people of color to live into antiracist ways of life together. The dark night experience is a call to the beatitudinal self-emptying discussed in Chapter 5. It is a call to surrender spiritually to God's transforming and purifying love, trusting that this experience of impasse will be generative and fruitful.

But, most importantly, it means coming to grips with the reality of my imprisonment as a white person. Facing that reality for what it is can then become the ground of compassion toward all who are imprisoned, either by white *habitus* or by the system of hyper-incarceration. Nonviolent white resistance born of the dark night entails this deep contemplative identification of the white person's soul with that of every other person. From a Buddhist perspective, Thich Nhat Hanh puts it well in his poem, "Please Call Me By My True Names": "I am the twelve-year-old girl,/refugee on the small boat,/who throws herself into the ocean/after being raped by a sea pirate./And I am the pirate,/ my heart not yet capable/of seeing and loving.... Please call me by my true names,/so I can wake up/and the door of my heart/could be left open,/the door of compassion."³³ He is calling for the sort of beatitudinal mercy witnessed by John Woolman in Chapter 5. Only by opening our hearts to one another's suffering, contemplating and holding the dignity of each oppressed person made *Imago Dei*, can we white people begin to grow in awareness of our complicity in racism and hyper-incarceration.

From my prison of internalized white racial superiority, can I contemplate the lived reality of the person imprisoned by the system of hyper-incarceration? Can I enter into the dual urgency of struggling to survive in white *habitus* while desperately wanting to get out? As Barndt notes, “Inside a prison, a prisoner must work hard to stay alive mentally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically. At the same time, a prisoner never stops thinking about getting out, either by completing the sentence or by escaping.”³⁴

Through contemplative nonviolent resistance, it becomes possible for *all of us* imprisoned by racism to live into our interior freedom before God. While an intimately personal process, it can only happen through communal solidarity. Barndt emphasizes, “Freedom within prison is a relational process that calls for the building of community inside the prison, a community of fellow prisoners who support and strengthen each other, a community of resistance committed to the struggle against racism.”³⁵

In her presidential address at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in 2004, Copeland named three duties of political theology in the social and cultural context of the United States: witness, memory, and lament. First, she said, “In order to interrupt the violence that tears at the fabric of our society, in order to do political theology, we theologians must be willing to sacrifice—our comforts, our security, our joys, perhaps, our lives.”³⁶ Throughout this volume, we have lifted up important witnesses in the history of antiracist work in the United States and in our own personal journeys toward greater awareness of our complicity as white people in racism: John Woolman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Clarence Jordan, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, the young Birmingham marchers, Gandhi, Ida B. Wells, James Baldwin, and W. E. B. Du Bois, among others. All of these witnesses testify to the spiritual necessity of willing sacrifice as part of dying to self.

As noted in Chapter 5, a nonviolent spirituality of white resistance to hyper-incarceration guided by the beatitudes will ultimately lead toward radical structural transformation at every level of society. Woolman perceived this truth in prerevolutionary America, and it is still true today. Martin Luther King, Jr., and James Perkinson rightly insisted that such transformation will require redistribution of wealth and simplification of lifestyles on the part of those who are the beneficiaries of the matrix of racism, militarism, and materialism. Some white people have readily embraced a program of scaling down their lifestyles in the face of the growing ecological crisis.³⁷ Could deeper collective awareness among white people of our complicity in

hyper-incarceration also provide a compelling impetus to redistribute the goods of society—education, health care, jobs, among others—in a way that truly serves the common good? Pursuing this goal as part of strategic action will most certainly lead to persecution. For evidence, we need look no further than Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, martyrdom as he prepared to launch the Poor People’s Campaign.

Remembering King and the others named above in our antiracist cloud of witnesses is a vital communal practice of resistance to racism. As Copeland noted, narratives of hope and perseverance in the face of massive suffering wrought by systematic oppression enable antiracist white people and people of color to “confront the brokenness and hurt, failures and joys that frighten us If we remember and tell our stories more inclusively, read all our stories against the grain of our own customs and mores, familial cultures and traditions, we will glimpse possibilities of hope and reconciliation.”³⁸

Around the country, for example, MAAFA observances commemorate through song, prayer, and dance the memory of all who suffered and died in the time of African capture and enslavement in America as well as their descendants.³⁹ A Kiswahili word meaning “great tragedy,” MAAFA commemoration gives local communities a means of re-mem-bering their bonds of humanity with one another and with their ancestors, remembering their egregious suffering while also celebrating their human dignity in a spirit of nonviolent resistance.

In Juárez, as Nancy Pineda-Madrid documents, the local community gathers in remembrance of all the young Latina women lost to feminicide in their region over the last two decades. Carrying pink or black crosses, protestors have gathered to march, stand vigil, and mark locations where mutilated female bodies have been found as a practice of nonviolent resistance to the scourge of feminicide.⁴⁰ In so doing, they “claim space and in that claimed space confront the horror of their pain, which eventually allows them to create a transformed world. This process ultimately refuses to allow this collective trauma to have the last word. In this transformed space, practitioners forge a new consciousness, a visible *communal* consciousness.”⁴¹

Finally, both Shawn Copeland and Bryan Massingale have emphasized the significance of lament as part of a theology and praxis of resistance to racism. Fundamentally, lament is contemplation in action. “Contemplation cannot be understood,” FitzGerald writes, “except within the context of desire, that is, divine desire coming to meet human desire and igniting in human hearts an unquenchable desire.”⁴² She points to the Spiritual Canticle of John of the Cross to lift up the potentially fruitful anguish of human desire, surrendering

before limit situations—like the Middle Passage, the systemic practice of lynchings, the institutionalized segregation of housing and education extending from the Jim Crow era to the present, and the system of hyper-incarceration—to be open at last to God’s desire for God’s creation: “ ‘Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me to my moaning? . . . /Reveal your presence! . . . /Extinguish these miseries . . . /Who has the power to heal me?’ (SC 1,6,10,11).”⁴³

As Copeland notes, the practice of lament gives voice to the grief of injustice and names it clearly. At the same time, precisely in the depth of anguish, it testifies to the truth of faith in God’s love through resisting hatred and violence: “Lament protests, pushes against that calculus of power by which the weak and vulnerable suffer oppression and abuse. Lament not only dialogues, but also boxes with God—questions, argues, rebukes. In this way, lament takes seriously God’s compassionate love and care in the midst of suffering and privation.”⁴⁴

Lament is the cry for help and healing that, as Baldwin noted at the top of this chapter, is the “basis of all dialogues.” Thus it can be a vital spiritual practice as antiracist white people and people of color undertake the work of building an antiracist community of resistance. When human words fail, appeal to the Word of God, to the truth of God’s love, carries with it the power to open space for transformation of consciousness, Massingale observes:

The nonrational and unconscious dimension of racism shows us that this injustice cannot be defeated solely or even principally through intellectual responses. Lament, however, provides a language that can disrupt the apparent normalcy of a skewed racialized culture and identity. Its cry of pain, rage, sorrow, and grief in the midst of suffering interrupts the “way things are” and demands attention.⁴⁵

By naming *with God* the struggle of impasse, lament bears witness to the power of God’s transformative love to effect change in situations where none seems possible.

CONCLUSION

Joseph Barndt’s work demonstrates that racism imprisons all people, including white people. Working toward dismantling the system of hyper-incarceration will require the basic contemplative realization that we are all dehumanized by it. Michelle Alexander concludes in *The New Jim Crow*,

Taking our cue from the courageous civil rights advocates who brazenly refused to defend themselves, marching unarmed past white mobs that threatened to kill them, we, too, must be the change we hope to create. If we want to do more than just end mass incarceration—if we want to put an end to the history of racial caste in America—we must lay down our racial bribes, join hands with people of all colors who are not content to wait for change to trickle down, and say to those who would stand in our way: Accept all of us or none.⁴⁶

We, Alex, Laurie, and I, have written this work as white Catholic theologians fully immersed in and socialized by white *habitus*. It constitutes the theological air we breathe, and it pervades the dominant theological culture that shapes, or rather, distorts, our whole way of relating to God, to other human beings, and to the rest of God's creation. In demonstrating white complicity in US hyper-incarceration, as theologians we are calling for not only personal but collective and common analysis of systemic racism, leading to common theological and societal work among antiracist white people and people of color toward structural transformation through collective action.

We call our colleagues in the theological guild, and in particular our white colleagues, to witness together the radical racial solidarity foundational to the task of ending hyper-incarceration. The dark night of impasse certainly characterizes this current time in the church as well as in the academic discipline of theology. As theologians, can we deepen our collective awareness of the profound role that white *habitus* plays in the ecclesial and societal tensions that affect how we pursue our common theological vocation? Alexander's challenge, "Accept all of us or none of us," viewed through a theological lens, evokes the infinite love of God for all of God's creation. May we theologians bear witness to that truth through active participation in antiracist communities of resistance, guided by the beatitudinal *askesis* of nonviolence as a way of being in the world as Jesus' disciples.

NOTES

1. James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt," in *The Price of the Ticket. Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985), pp. 411–412, emphasis in the original.
2. Barbara Applebaum, "In the Name of Morality: Moral Responsibility, Whiteness, and Social Justice Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 34, no. 3 (2005): 277–290 at 284.
3. Barbara Applebaum, "Race Ignore-ance, Colortalk, and White Complicity: Race Is . . . Race Isn't," *Educational Theory* 56, no. 3 (2006): 345–362 at 346–348.

4. Applebaum, "In the Name of Morality," p. 286.
5. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: a Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia, PA, Temple University Press, 1997), pp. 291–300 at 292.
6. Applebaum, "In the Name of Morality," p. 287.
7. Barbara Applebaum, "White Complicity and Social Justice Education: Can One Be Culpable Without Being Liable?," *Educational Theory* 57, no. 4 (2007): 453–467 at 456.
8. Applebaum, "Race Ignore-ance, Colortalk, and White Complicity," p. 353.
9. Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 129–137.
10. Ibid., pp. 127–128.
11. The conference was entitled, "White Privilege: Implications for the Catholic University, the Church, and Theology," March 26–28, 2006. Video recordings of the plenary presentations are available at <http://www.nd.edu/~wpconf/>. That of Peggy McIntosh, however, was not recorded due to potential and actual threats from white supremacists that she received as a result of her antiracist scholarship and activism.
12. James Baldwin, "On Being 'White'... and Other Lies," in *Black on White. Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*, ed. David R. Roediger (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), pp. 177–180 at 179.
13. James Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man," in *Black on White. Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*, ed. David R. Roediger (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), pp. 255–273.
14. See Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).
15. Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, p. 208.
16. Eileen O'Brien, "The Political Is Personal: The Influence of White Supremacy on White Antiracists' Personal Relationships," in *White Out. The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 262.
17. Ibid., p. 266.
18. Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, p. 228.
19. O'Brien, "The Political Is Personal," p. 267.
20. Kay Pranis, "Face-to-Face Public Spaces. Reflective Community Dialog Helps Create New Community Standards," *VOMA Connections* 6 (Summer 2000): 1.
21. L. Thomas Winfree, Jr., "Peacemaking and Community Harmony: Lessons (and Admonitions) from the Navajo Peacemaking Courts," in *Restorative Justice. Theoretical Foundations*, ed. Elmar G. M.

- Weitekamp and Hans-Jürgen Kerner (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2002), pp. 290–291. This general account of the circle process is part of a longer treatment I developed in “Whose Justice? Which Relationality?,” in *Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence*, ed. Gerald W. Schlabach (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), pp. 111–129.
22. Carolyn Boyes-Watson, *Peacemaking Circles & Urban Youth: Bring Justice Home* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Living Justice Press, 2008), pp. 12–13.
 23. Kay Pranis, “Restorative Justice, Social Justice, and the Empowerment of Marginalized Populations,” in *Restorative Community Justice: Repairing Harm and Transforming Communities*, ed. S. G. Bazemore and M. Schiff (Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing Co., 2001), pp. 288–289.
 24. Barry Stuart, “Guiding Principles for Peacemaking Circles,” in *Restorative Community Justice: Repairing Harm and Transforming Communities*, ed. S. G. Bazemore and M. Schiff (Cincinnati, Ohio: Anderson Pub., 2001), p. 224.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
 26. Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, Pennsylvania: Good Books, 2002), p. 36.
 27. Pranis, “Restorative Justice, Social Justice, and the Empowerment,” p. 291.
 28. Heinrich Gross, “Peace,” in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, ed. Johannes B. Bauer (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 648.
 29. See Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1987), pp. 10–16; Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1990), pp. 130–132.
 30. Pranis, “Restorative Justice, Social Justice, and the Empowerment,” p. 287.
 31. Pranis, “Restorative Justice, Social Justice, and the Empowerment,” pp. 292–293; Stuart, “Guiding Principles,” p. 228.
 32. See Constance FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” in *Women’s Spirituality. Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn (New York: Paulist Press, Second edition, 1996), pp. 411–412; “From Impasse to Hope,” *CTSA Proceedings* 64 (2009): 21–42.
 33. Thich Nhat Hanh, “Please Call Me By My True Names,” in *Thich Nhat Hanh. Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 81. He wrote this poem in 1978 while working with boat refugees.
 34. Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, p. 220.
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 222–223.
 36. Shawn Copeland, “Political Theology as Interruptive,” *CTSA Proceedings* 59 (2004): 71–82 at 80.

37. For example, the Transition Movement begun in Ireland and England is spreading rapidly across the United States: <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>
38. Copeland, "Political Theology as Interruptive," p. 80.
39. See, for example, this notice about the 2012 MAAFA commemoration in New Orleans: <http://www.ashecac.org/main/index.php/tutorials/ashe-calendar/icalrepeat.detail/2012/07/07/9/-/maafa-commemorating-the-transatlantic-slave-trade>
40. Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation*, pp. 99 ff.
41. Ibid., p. 111.
42. Constance FitzGerald, "The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplation," in *Light Burdens, Heavy Blessings*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon et al. (Quincy, Illinois: Franciscan Press, 2000), pp. 201–222 at 203–204.
43. FitzGerald, "The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplation," pp. 208–209.
44. Copeland, "Political Theology as Interruptive," p. 81.
45. Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 110.
46. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), p. 245.

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The Scandal of White Complicity in US Hyper-incarceration

A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance

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